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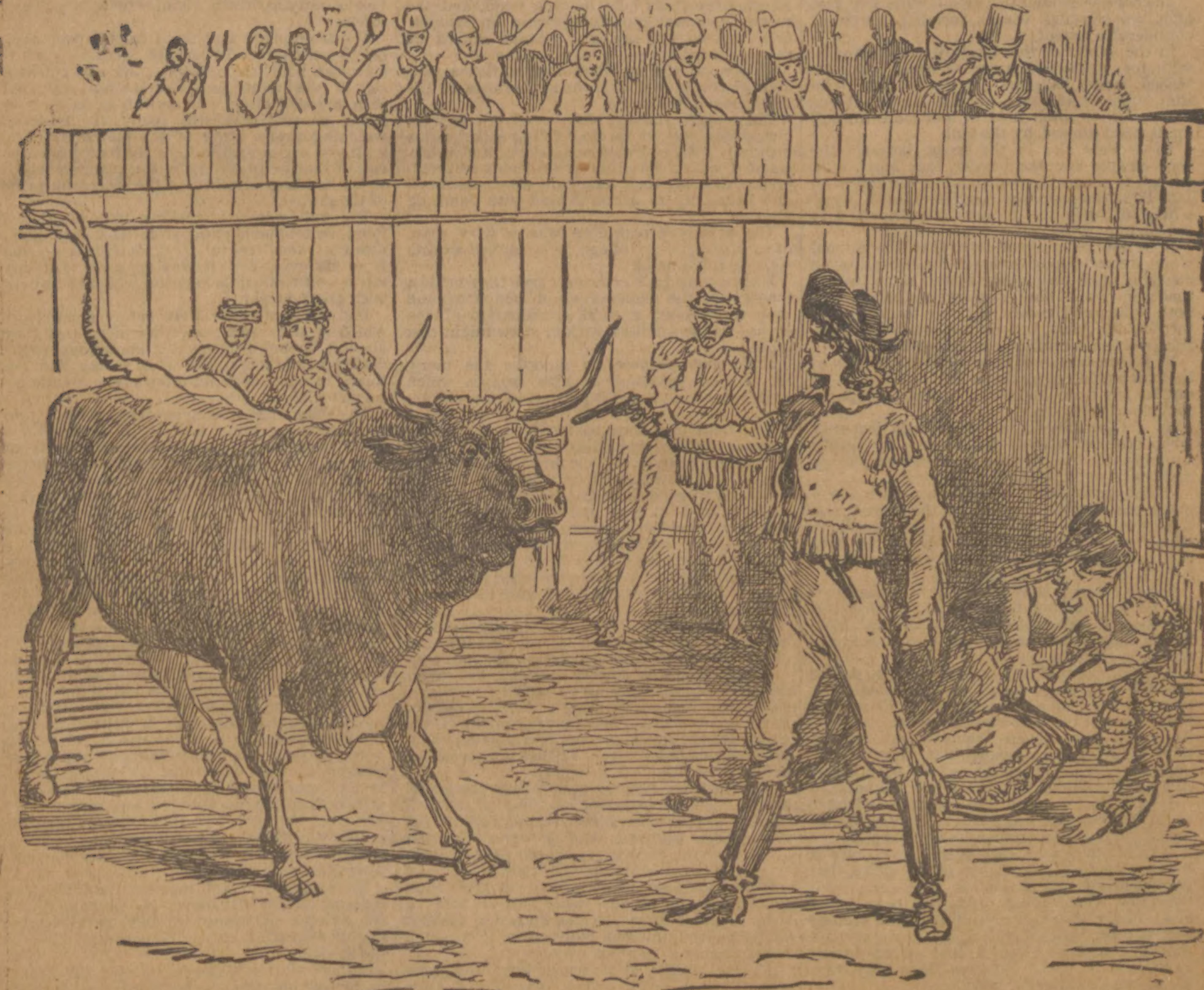
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BUCKSKIN SAM, THE TEXAS TRAILER; or, THE BANDITS OF THE BRAVO.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



"HURRAH!" FROM THE VAST ASSEMBLY WENT UP ONE LOUD CRY, AND UPON EVERY LIP WERE TWO WORDS: "BUCKSKIN SAM!"

Buckskin Sam, THE TEXAS TRAILER; OR, The Bandits of the Bravo.

A Life Story of a True Trail, founded upon incidents in the adventurous career of the noted Texas Ranger, Major Sam S. Hall—"Buckskin Sam,"—from notes furnished by his comrades on Plaza and Plain.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE SEA CADET," "BLACK PLUME,"
"THE SEA SLIPPER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BULL-FIGHT.

It was a gala day in the Alamo City. For many weeks it had been publicly announced that a certain noted purveyor to the amusement-loving citizens of Monterey, Mexico, would visit San Antonio, in the "Lone Star State," and inaugurate a series of bull-fights.

The well known manager of this noted Spanish exhibition, had engaged half a dozen matadores, two of whom boasted of deeds and dexterity never equaled.

The populace of San Antonio, at that time, was largely composed of Mexican, with a liberal sprinkling of Castilian, families; the remainder were people of an adventurous character, coming from all portions of the United States, with outcasts and adventurers from across the sea. Indeed, most of the people of the Alamo City were fond of any sport, no matter how dangerous or deadly was its nature, so that it supplied that excitement which becomes as necessary as food to those whose trails often run through dark and bloody grounds.

Upon the open prairie, across the San Pedro creek, was erected a circular screen of canvas, twelve feet high, held in position by posts, from the top of which to the ground, descended tiers of seats in the style of the interior of a circus tent.

The barrier around the arena, some five feet high, was of rough boards, forming a circle, of considerable extent.

In the center of this circle was a stout pole, with four projecting arms, to which were attached ropes, hanging downward, and with iron rings in the end, at just the height for a matadore to catch hold of and raise himself up, if hard pressed by the bull.

There were also in the arena, between the rope escapes and the barrier, four holes, deep enough to conceal a man standing upright in it. Into these the matadore could leap for safety at a moment when the enraged bull expected to impale him on his horns.

It is not generally known that the animal which depends upon its horns for assault, when charging upon an enemy, at the same instant that it lowers its head, also spreads out its legs, both behind and before, not only to give more force to the blow, but to prevent being overturned when coming in contact with the foe.

By this means it will be seen that all the feet of the bull would not go down into the escape-pit dug for the man, who would thereby escape injury from the hoofs.

Should the life of a matadore be in jeopardy when crowded against the barrier, his agility would enable him to place his hands on the top and bound over among the spectators.

At the east side of the arena were two sets of gates, one forming a portion of the barrier, and the other connecting with a small corral, in which were confined the bulls, fresh-rope from the prairies, fat, sleek, full of fire and fight, and furious at their loss of liberty.

I have entered thus minutely into the arena and its surrounding, it being known that this was the first bull-fight ever known in the United States, and to give an idea of how this brutal sport is conducted.

At the appointed hour, on the eventful day of the fight, hordes of people wended their way toward the scene, coming from Plaza and Plain, and not the least conspicuous among them being the gayly dressed señoritas, escorted by their shadows, the *duennas*, who kept faithful guard over their flirtations, except when a few silver *pesos* blinded them for a few moments.

Sharing the honors of conspicousness with the beautiful señoritas, was a band of young horsemen, who had won fame as Texas Rangers.

A handsome, dashing set of men, ever jolly in the face of death, dressed in fancy attire, that gave them the look of dandies, to those who did not know what gallant deeds had been theirs, and mounted upon superb animals that seemed almost a part of their riders, it was no wonder that the beauties of San Antonio were gazing in admiration upon them, and that they were the heroes of the entire populace.

At the head of this gallant troop of horsemen, rode the hero of this, my true story of Texas trails, Buckskin Sam, whose name was known along the length of the Rio Grande, and the breadth of the Lone Star State, as a man who

never deserted a friend in distress or a foe in the deadly encounter.

Lariating their horses upon the prairie, Buckskin Sam and his comrades entered the canvas inclosed space, and took prominent positions, from whence to view the entertainment, themselves the observed of all observers.

And upon the face of their young leader, Buckskin Sam, the eyes of men and boys turned in hero-worship, while the glances of admiration that were shot at him from the dark orbs of the señoritas, proved that many a little heart was willing to have his image engraven on it forever.

A man of slight stature, slender waist, and broad shoulders, Sam's form would attract attention for its look of subtle strength and endurance, while his face, darkly-bronzed, and full of calm self-confidence, would win the regard of a good person, the dread of an evil one.

Another feature of the assemblage, were a number of sporting men of San Antonio, who also came in for their share of observation and admiration, as there were heroes among them, too, though of a different heroism from that of the Rangers.

And yet, there were fair faces turned upon them, especially from among the Fandango queens, the belle of whom was a brilliant coquette, Mariana Coyen, a woman of strange character, who under the rule of strong passions would go to extremes in acts directly at variance with the dictates of her better nature.

Half an hour before the *entree* of the first bull every seat was occupied, and loud and impatient cries rung from all sides.

"El Torro—El Tor-rr-rr-o!"

"Drive in yer fightin' quadripids!"

"Sling open yer corral an' start yer fun!"

"H'ist out yer Greaser-slayers, fer we is spilin' fer suthin' enjoyable."

Such were the yells that filled the air, until the ruder element reigned supreme, and the audience became a mob, to calm which, Buckskin Sam coolly drew his revolver and fired at the gilt arrow that acted as a weather-vane on the top of the center pole.

The first shot struck it fairly on the dart and spun it round, and then rapidly flashed the ranger's revolvers held in each hand, and the metal arrow was kept flying round and round, for, marvelous to say, not a bullet missed its mark!

This wonderful exhibition of marksmanship quieted the crowd until the appearance of the matadores in the arena.

These agile, sinewy, sharp-eyed bravos were gorgeously attired in close-fitting silk leggins profusely bebuttoned, fringed shirts, and short-waisted jackets of red and green, richly embroidered with gold; their long hair, oiled, perfumed and bound up in a cue behind with flaunting ribbons.

The principal matadore was a wiry man, of some forty years of age, who carried a crimson flag in his hand.

Drawing up in a crescent curve they made a low bow to the audience, amid loud *vivas*, and then commenced a rigid examination of the arena—as the smallest stick or stone might cost a life.

I do not propose to describe the many active feats and hair-breadth escapes which occurred during the first portion of the exhibition.

Five bulls had been beaten from the arena, covered with banderillas and blood, their tongues hanging from their mouths, completely fagged and cowed, with but just life enough left to stagger back to the corral. At last as noble a beast as ever spurned prairie sod was being prepared for the lists; loud cries of "El toro nigro!" came from the Mexicans of the audience, and thick clouds of the fragrant smoke of corn-shuck *segarettas* rolled gracefully from a thousand mouths and nostrils over the inclosure.

The matadores thrust their heads into buckets of water, and each drank a stiff horn of brandy to brace for the contest to come.

A side gate was opened and into the arena galloped the manager upon a fiery mustang, gayly caparisoned, holding a long, glittering lance in his hand. The hurried orders of the manager, the quick glances and excited manner of the matadores showed that the encounter before them was no child's play.

The audience became aware that the grand event of the day was about to come off, and all eagerly watched the entrance gate, and, as the signal horn sounded, a deathless silence fell upon the vast concourse, broken only by the fierce bellowing of the enraged bull.

Each matadore stood with watchful eyes, braced for the charge, with barbed bars of steel, to which fireworks and fluttering ribbons were attached, in hand, which were to be stuck in the animal to increase his rage.

At the sounding of the second horn, the gates were thrown open, and a magnificent bull, black as ebony, and as glossy as a race-horse, entered the arena.

He stood, a perfect type of prairie freedom, with eyes inflamed by fury, pawing madly at the earth, his long, slender horns, tipped with

black, glittering like lance-points, and as sharp. The bull gave one amazed, furious look at the flaunting red flag in his front, held by the chief matadore; one half-frightened, hurried glance about, as the vast audience gave a yell of admiration; and then the beautiful beast advanced proudly, with head erect, snuffing the air, into the arena.

As the huge gates slammed behind the animal his whole frame trembled for a moment at the strangeness of the scene before him.

It was but for a moment. The red flag tauntingly fluttered but an instant when, with one grand gathering of all the immense muscular power in his frame, the bull sprung into the midst of the matadores.

In another moment the beast stood upon the opposite side of the arena, trampling the red flag beneath its feet, two of the matadores were swinging from the safety rings, some were crouching in the holes, others had leaped over the barriers, while the manager upon his mustang, which snorted and pranced in terror, was spurring for dear life toward the entrance gate.

A deep bellow, a cloud of dust, and, like an arrow sent from the bow, went the maddened brute, toward the man and mustang.

The former in an instant comprehended his great peril, as none of his matadores were in the ring to draw the bull from him with their flags. Quickly he attempted to turn his horse, and point his lance, but before this movement could be accomplished the furious beast was upon him, and one long, glittering horn pierced the mustang, just back of the shoulder, tearing through the lungs and heart.

One horrible, piercing shriek, such as is only given by a horse in the agony of fear and pain—one agonized, pleading look at his master, almost human in its expression, from the mortally wounded steed, and then, as the bull jerked clear, a great stream of blood spurted ten feet into the arena, blinding the bull for a moment, and bespattering the gaudy costumes of the matadores who were now attempting to draw the animal away from the manager. The latter quickly shook his feet clear from the stirrups, as the horse gave a spasmodic leap into the air and fell dead against the barrier, and with a face ghastly as death clambered to a place of safety.

The triumphant bull stood impatiently pawing the earth, trembling with madness and excitement, while the audience gave a long-drawn sigh of relief at the escape of the manager, and then one wild cheer of admiration, as the bull stood, panting, but still ready for business, watching every move of the matadores, who scattered and prepared for a fresh attack at the risk of limb or life, to gain the plaudits which so far had been lavished on the successful pride of the prairie.

The bull was now reeking with blood and foam, its tongue hanging from its mouth, madness that was dreadful to contemplate glaring from its eyes, and it was apparent that any movement toward the monster would be fraught with great danger.

But the matadores were before an audience which would brook no cowardice, and they knew it, though perhaps this knowledge was a detriment to them in the work before them, as forced bravery does not often bring a satisfactory result.

The chief matadore approached with a new flag in front of him. One lunge of the bull, a quick leap aside by the matadore without changing the position of the flag, and the horns of the bull were again ornamented with red rags while a banderilla was plunged deep into the shoulder of the beast, thereby adding to his fury. Tearing the flag from his horns, in an instant the fierce brute sprung in pursuit of a matadore, who was running to escape by leaping the barrier. He caught the man on his horns, throwing him high into the air, to the horror of the spectators, and with a sickening thud the man fell to the earth. One bound and the long tapering horns went crunching through his body, which, dripping with blood, amid cries of horror, was hurled again into the dusty air, and fell within ten feet of the barrier.

At this same instant with a pent-up cry of agony Mariana Coyen, the beautiful Queen of the Fandangoes, leaped the barrier, and flitting to the prostrate form of the mangled bull-fighter tenderly took his head upon her breast, kneeling upon the blood-stained earth; the bull stood with lolling tongue and flashing eyes, not six feet from Mariana, who rocked to and fro the head of the dying man. The audience arose to their feet but were chained there by the harrowing scene.

Thus, for one awful moment the tableau remained, for the danger of the woman holding the dying man, seemed to have paralyzed the matadores with terror, and one and all stood spellbound.

No, not all, for a slender, wiry form suddenly forced his way to the front, and with an agile leap, he cleared the barrier, and was the next instant in the arena.

But he did not stop there, as a few springs brought him between the bull and his intended victims

Buckskin Sam.

Then, from the vast assembly went up one loud cry, and upon every lip were two words: "Buckskin Sam!"

But, how was Sam, brave as he was known to be, to save the dying man and the heroic girl, from instant death, when the trained matadores feared to meet the maddened beast?

But, cool as an icicle, Sam stood, while the bull now turned his flaming eyes upon him as his foe, who quickly drew his revolver and held it in a hand as firm as iron.

The audience held their breath in horror and cautionary cries came from the Texans as the report of the revolver burst sharp and quick, upon the air, mingled with a piercing shriek.

At the instant the pistol belched forth its deadly messenger, the bull gave one bound into the air and fell dead at the feet of Buckskin Sam, who quickly placed his foot upon the head of the brute, and then cast his eyes toward the point from whence had proceeded the shriek at the moment of his seeming peril.

He saw in that glance a beautiful Castilian girl being borne away in a dead faint. He caught but a glimpse of her features; but in that glance he photographed them upon his brain.

Wild, hearty, prolonged cheers rent the air, and Sam doffed his sombrero to the admiring crowd, as he assisted Mariana to her feet and delivered her to her friends, for the matadore had breathed his last. The bull-fight was over and the most exacting could not admit that they had had four bits' worth of tragedy. From what could be gathered from the weeping Mariana she had seen the matadore but twice since his arrival from Monterey, but that limited acquaintance had been sufficient to cause her to risk her life for him. Fair daughters of Mexico! what will you not do for him who is in danger, or distress? Your charity and affection are truly boundless.

And homeward went the motley crowd, while Buckskin Sam, accompanied by his Texan friends, repaired to the Plaza House, their place of rendezvous in San Antonio.

CHAPTER II.

THE FALSE FRIEND.

NEARLY a score of years previous to the opening of my romance, there lived in great pomp and luxury, a league from the main Plaza of Monterey, an old Spaniard by the name of Rafael Castro, with his family, which consisted of his wife, and a son, their only child.

This son, Jose Castro, after having completed his studies under private tutors at home, had been sent to Cuba to receive a polish to his education in the gay city of Havana.

Upon his return home an elegant gentleman, he was accompanied by a fellow-student who also claimed high rank and vast riches in Old Spain.

Lorenzo Brogado, for such was the name of Jose Castro's friend, was received with warm welcome by Don Rafael and his wife, who rejoiced that their son had a *camarada* worthy of his own blue blood.

With the stables well stocked with fleet steeds, the cellars filled with choice wines, the two young men had every prospect of enjoyment, and, recently slaves to their books, they now galloped over the extensive rancho, and often into the city of Monterey, where they had the *entree* into the most aristocratic circles of society. A constant round of pleasure, of some weeks' duration followed, during which Lorenzo Brogado was forced, by the non-arrival of funds from his parents in Spain, to borrow somewhat heavily from his friend Jose.

The latter rejoiced to have it in his power to befriend one who had seemingly relinquished other projects and plans to accompany him to his home in Mexico.

The manner in which so many doubloons were disposed of by Lorenzo at last became a perplexing subject of thought to Jose, until searching in the city for him during one of his many unaccountable absences, he found his friend deeply engaged in betting at *monte* at one of the many gambling houses. Pained though he was, he made no remark though it caused him many a thoughtful hour.

A short time after the discovery both he and Lorenzo attended a ball or *danza*, given by the Alcalde of Monterey, where both young men were introduced to a beautiful girl who had just entered society, and who also belonged to a family who prided themselves on their wealth and lineage.

The name of this lovely creature was Marietta Penaloza, and it was no wonder that both Jose and Lorenzo became smitten by her many charms of education, beauty and character.

Suffice it to say that Jose Castro eventually became the accepted lover of Marietta, and that upon the rejection of Lorenzo his villainous nature became unvailed. He leagued himself with bandits, and at their head, upon the night of the nuptials of Jose and Marietta, attacked the hacienda, and attempted to abduct the bride.

Although this devilish project was not successful the fiendish rovers of the chaparrals shot both Don Rafael and his wife Inez; they dying before the defenders of the hacienda succeeded

in driving the bandits from the grounds, and without being permitted to give their blessing to Jose, their dearly loved son.

Jose and Marietta, filled with grief, took up their abode in the old hacienda; but were kept in constant alarm by the frequent attempts of Lorenzo to avenge himself upon his rival in love. Shortly after the birth of a daughter, who was christened Lena Castro, Don Jose was called away from his home on public matters, and in his absence the rancho was again attacked by the bandits, and Marietta captured, and taken to the mountain retreat of the band, the infant child escaping only through the efforts of its nurse who secreted herself with the little one in the shrubbery of the garden,—and she was the only servant left on the hacienda upon the return of the master.

In a frenzy of grief Don Jose employed for months a number of men, well armed and mounted, and at their head scoured the country, high and low, far and near, for his lost wife, but in vain. Fearing, from the past, the power of his enemy in the future, he sold out his entire estate, and well disguised, with his daughter and the faithful nurse, he secretly fled to San Antonio, Texas, hoping that there his vindictive enemy, Lorenzo Brogado, would never find him, to rob him of his only loved one, his darling child Lena.

Don Jose, upon his arrival in San Antonio invested a large portion of his funds in real estate, in and about the town. At this time there were but few American residents of the city, and soon after, when the tide of emigration swept that way, he became immensely wealthy by the advance in landed property. But with all his wealth Don Jose was far from being happy; the tragic death of his parents haunted him in his dreams and a thousand fearful conjectures in regard to the condition of his wife Marietta so preyed upon his mind that it was a wonder his reason was not unseated.

All these bereavements, so dreadful to brood over, having come upon him through the perfidious treachery of one he had called friend, who had so often broken bread with him, and shared his purse, steeled him against all men, and he looked upon none as his friend, trusted no one with his hopes, except his daughter, and closely hugged his fears of future trouble within his own breast.

The consequence was he seldom went out, knew but little of the doings in the outside world, and gained the name of being proud and morose. Knowing from the past that Lorenzo Brogado would hesitate at no crime to satisfy his inhuman enmity, he was in constant dread of his daughter being taken from him by that devilish monster.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPANISH RECLUSE.

ONE of the grandest homes in San Antonio was the abode of Don Jose Castro, the recluse, as the citizens were wont to call him.

An almost broken-hearted man he lived alone for his daughter, and gathered around her every luxury that heart could desire.

Austere to others, to her he was ever gentle, and now as we find him seated alone in his elegant library late in the afternoon of the day of the bull-fight, bitterly musing on the past, his thoughts of the beautiful Lena mingle in his bitter memories, for, to please her only he had gone to the exciting exhibition, the gala scene that opens this story.

Two things had particularly attracted the attention of the Don, and over both he was deeply worried.

First, from their seats, which were very near the spot where the matadore had fallen, the Don had observed the eyes of the dying bull-fighter fixed upon Lena with a look he could not fathom, even though the man knew that death was not far from him, and lay in the arms of Mariana Coyen, the Queen Coquette, as she was often called.

In vain was it that Mariana bent over the wounded matadore, trying to fix his dying gaze upon her; his eyes would roam to the beautiful face of Lena Castro, and there dwell with an unfathomable stare.

This strange look Lena noticed, as well as did her father, but neither spoke to the other regarding it.

The other cause of distress to the Don, was the shriek given by Lena, at the danger of Buckskin Sam, when he fearlessly sprung to the rescue of the dying matadore and Fandango Queen, and her fainting at the risk he run.

But upon this subject also the Don had not spoken to Lena, though now, as he sat alone in his library, he mused deeply upon the scenes.

"I fear that my child has in some way met this young Ranger," he muttered half aloud, "though she has never spoken to me upon the subject."

"Ah me! what if she should love him, as her deep emotion certainly leads me to believe?"

"It is wrong in me to keep her out of society, where she can meet men who are of equal rank as herself, and I will in future see that she holds the position to which she is entitled, for, though there is nothing against that dashing

young Ranger Buckskin Sam, he is not the one I would select as a husband for my daughter.

"I will send for her, and find out just how deeply she is interested in him," and tinkling a silver bell, Don Jose bade the servant who answered its summons, to ask the Senorita Lena to come to the library.

Rising, he paced the room slowly, and his dark, sad face was clouded more than was usual; but then in the past he had much to sorrow for, and remembering that Lorenzo Brogado still lived, he feared daily that another blow might be struck at his life, or, worse still, his daughter be torn from him as his wife had been.

A few moments only he waited and the door opening, Lena Castro swept into the room.

A form of rare grace, and a face of exquisite loveliness, it was no wonder that the gallants of San Antonio were wont to vote her father an old wretch for keeping her out of society, where they could lay siege to her heart and hand.

Dressed in a snowy robe, that set off her dark beauty to perfection, her father gazed on her in rapt admiration as he took her hand and led her to a seat.

"I hope my daughter has fully recovered from her indisposition of the morning?" said Don Jose, kissing her affectionately.

"Wholly, father; it was foolish in me to be so overcome at the look of a man I did not know."

"The look! you mean the danger of the young Ranger?"

Lena flushed slightly, but said in reply:

"No, father; the look of that dying matadore overcame me, for it made me very nervous, and I saw in it a presentiment of evil."

Don Jose turned deadly pale, but trying to hide his fears, he answered:

"I too noticed his strange look, and somehow his face haunted me like a vision in a dream, as though I had seen it before; but, my child, I feared that your fainting, when the Ranger whom they call Buckskin Sam, placed his life in peril, showed a deeper interest in him than a young girl should feel for one who was not an accepted lover."

"No, father, I feel only kindly toward the Ranger, though it is true I have met him before, as he it was who so severely punished the wild cow-boy that day, for throwing his lasso and catching my horse."

"Ahl he it was; you said only then that it was a handsome young Ranger; I owe him gratitude, and shall thank him when next we meet."

"Now, Lena, I wish to speak to you upon a subject near my heart."

"I am listening, father."

"I wish you to go more into society, and to mingle with men and women, for there are good old families here, as you know; and, my child, there is one whom I would be willing to see you love."

Lena arched her beautiful brows, but asked no questions audibly, of who this favored one in her father's eyes might be.

"It is Augustin Siliceo; he is wealthy, a gentleman, and well fitted to make you happy, and I have had a letter from him, asking the honor of offering you his attentions."

"Remember, I do not pledge you to him, only I know of no one I would rather see your suitor; now, my child, you may accept the invitation to the *danzas* that are given here, and I know you will reign supreme as a belle; now we will go for a drive," and shortly after the stylish equipage of Don Jose Castro, astonished the citizens of San Antonio by driving through the streets, with the father and daughter seated in it, and which caused a noted monte sport to remark to a brother gambler:

"At the bull-fight this morning and now driving through San Antonio. I'll bet a thousand pesos that the Don is going to bring his daughter out in society, and if he does, that she'll be the reigning belle within the month."

The bets were taken at once; not from a depreciation of Lena's charms, but because it was natural for the gamblers to wager pesos on anything where there was a chance to win or lose.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RANGERS' BIVOUAC.

THE San Pedro Springs, situated a mile from the main plaza of San Antonio, have long been the Mecca of the traveler's hopes, coming as he does across the burning sands, with no moisture to soothe his burning throat after a long and dreary trail from the northern plains.

Out of the limestone ledge gurgles the limpid water, and around it is a grove of trees that cast upon it a cooling shade, while trailing vines and festoons of Spanish moss make it a retreat that seems a Paradise to those who have been facing the heat of the sun for many a dreary mile across the plains.

In this little grove many thrilling scenes have transpired, and many a desperate encounter has been there, when men stood face to face in the deadly duello.

And here, upon the night following the day of the tragical bull-fight, a picturesque scene is presented to view, for it is a bivouac of Texas

Buckskin Sam.

Rangers; a band of roving, daring spirits that have made their names feared upon plaza, plain and in the wild chaparrals.

Among these Rangers are those who were at the bull-fight with Buckskin Sam, whose daring deed and deadly shot was the theme of conversation around the camp-fires.

Indolently lying upon their serapes, smoking and talking, were men who have won names in Texas as the bravest of the brave, for the one humming a love song in a low voice, is Reckless Joe, the daring brothers, known the South-west over as the Fighting Thompsons, Bill Lambert, Tom Clark the Ranger Spy, Rio Grande Bill and others, all dressed in the jaunty style of the Rangers, with top boots, buckskin leggins, with rows of silver buttons down the outer seams, embroidered shirts and jackets, and a black slouch hat with a silver star looping up one side of the broad brim.

Other members of the band were less fancifully attired, and their darkly-bronzed faces and worn clothing showed that they had lately been on trails.

Among these were men also famous in the annals of border warfare, for Big Foot Wallace, Dutch Pete, Hoggy Bennett, Jack Hodge, the Stage Driver, and Clown, the Apache Scalptaker, were there.

At the camp-fire, bustling about with all the extra airs and gestures of a French cook, was a negro, of some forty years of age. This was Austin, the most polite and polished negro in Texas; he having traveled all over Europe with his master, where he had picked up aristocratic notions and foreign language.

Everybody knew Austin, and he prided himself on being intimate with all the members of the State Government—more especially with Governor Houston. Austin was black as ebony, neat, and very dressy, not to say foppish—for he considered a broadcloth suit, flashy neck-tie, and stove-pipe hat indispensable to his dignity—even while superintending the culinary department of a Ranger camp.

Dutch Pete was celebrated over Western Texas as the boss mule-whacker and roper wherever he went, and now, as we glance upon the camp, he is talking very emphatically and gesticulating vigorously at two refractory mules that, mule-like, have wandered from good feed, near camp, to a barren spot over the creek.

Each Ranger is intent upon clearing arms or examining equipments, as through the groves the cry from the camp-fire:

"Oh, yes! O-o-o-o-o yes, masters! Cum ri! Roll along towards dis lumin'us center ob subtractshun! De graby am propellin' itself off dis luxur'ous beefsteak, an' condensin' inter de blue tomb abuv us. Dat coffee, gemmen, beats de Parley Voos! I'se greevin' cauz Massa Sam ain't here, he's 'scruminatin' nuff ter 'preciate coffee ob my corncockshun."

It needed no second invitation from the negro to bring the hungry Rangers about the fire, with their tin cups and bowie-knives ready for the meal of corn-pone, beefsteak, broiled upon the coals, and black coffee. These were gracefully dealt out by Austin, whose face beamed with self-satisfied smiles.

"By the royal crown of James!" exclaimed Reckless Joe. "Austin, you are a treasure. It is not often we Texans have a man to cook for us who has traversed the Old World, gazed at monarchs on their thrones, tramped the Boulevards, and wandered through the ruins of ancient Rome. It is a mystery to me how you ever picked up so much knowledge in Europe, and still never forgot the ways and habits of Texas."

"Now, look a-hore, Joe," broke in Big Foot, "we-uns stampeded this-a-ways fer grub, an' if you an' Austin gits to palaverin' 'bout Yurup, my fodder won't go down good; if yer has any lingo 'bout Texas, jess spit'er out, an' I'll call it hunk; I've weekened on ev'rything what don't consarn this 'ere section. We're in a quiet spot, whar a war'-hoop or Greaser-yell ain't likely ter bu'st in between bites; an' let's make a squar' meal, peppered with Texas talk if anything, an, I'll 'low, fer myself, that I don't hanker arter much tongue-musick, when I'm a-feedin'."

"All right, me lord duke," answered Joe, laughing good-humoredly. "I'm always ready to listen to the wishes and counsel of the King of the Live-oaks. Austin, this steak is delicious, and the coffee as good as can be had at the old French market in New Orleans."

Austin, from behind Big Foot, gracefully waved his thanks for the compliment, giving at the same time, a respectful nod and significant wink toward the Giant Scout, as much as to say he needed no second hint from the latter to keep his tongue still.

"You're right, Big Foot," added Fighting Ben, "a man can get a square deal without going across the drink. We've got longer river's, deeper canyons and bigger prairies than they can shake up anywhere. We can make a layout of England inside of one of our prairie-dog towns an' not interfere much with the game of the dogs. I had a great deal rather spread myself before one of your good dinners, Austin, than hear you expatiante on the gimcrack notions of the Parley Vous an' Johnny Bulla.

Jack, what makes you so glum to-night? Reckon they didn't deal square enough to suit you at the Bull's Head last night?"

"That thar danged whisky o' Bob Caile's beat me a cussed sight more'n ther game," answered Jack Hodge; "fact on it were, I cudn't bet ter win, fur I were so danged full o' pisun that ther spots doubled on me ev'ry time. When ev'ry ace is a deuce things don't look squar'. an' I don't linger long arter ther Jacks 'gin ter wink at me an' gallop round ther lay-out. Clown," continued Jack, turning to his pard, "'pears ter me you ware as full as a foun'd'r'd stage-horse yerself, an' yer looks as discour'aged as I'm feelin'."

"I duz feel kinder purplish," responded Clown, "an' I'm thinkin' I ware purty considerble full o' whisk', ter fall asleep an' miss ther bull-fight. But I don't feel so danged down in ther mouth as I shu'd ef yer warn't in ther same box yerself, Jack."

"That bull fight was a big thing," broke in Bill Lambert quickly, "and Buckskin Sam made his point as usual. He always makes his move before any one else gets things through their head. The way he made that leap from the barrier, clear over Mariana's head, and faced that bull was a sight worth seeing; but I've seen him do things up just as neat before. Haven't you, Joe?"

"You're right, me lord," answered Joe proudly, tearing off a huge mouthful of steak. "Sam's a right royal youth. It's a high honor, I think, that I can call him pard from the days when he wasn't bigger'n a ration of bacon. He's white and square, any way you may take him. He will share the last biscuit or drink of water with any one who is suffering."

"Boys!" exclaimed Big Foot, in a quiet, confidential tone unusual for him, "that Sam are, I believe, ther whitest, squarest feller I've met in a year o' Sundays. He's constertooted ter make a fust-class Texan. He's a heap solider'n most o' ther lads what cumms frum ther States. Fact are I never see'd any as young as he are so danged fur from hum, an' on ther fight at that; an' he looks as rosy an' pretty as a young gal. Put calico on him an' ther boys w'u'd be arter him right piert I rec'ons. I ain't educated, but I can tell from ther good what sparkles in his peepers, an' what I has seen o' him, that it 'u'd be a hard job ter find his ekil in any section. If that feller of old times what Joe told me 'bout, Dodgerknees, what went round huntin' a man what w'u'd give a squar' deal with a Jack-a-lanturn, had a-run ag'in' Sam, his biz w'u'd 'a' bin bu'sted, an' his occipation gone up. If ther cuss lived now, an' ud cum ter Texas he'd light on a few what pollyticks ha'n't damoralized an' what don't wear b'iled shirts. Sam ought ter be this-a-ways 'bout now, hadn't he, Bill?"

"When I left him," answered Bill Lambert, "he would not promise when he would come out to camp, as he had business to attend to. Some cf Cortina's cut-throats, and a lot of horse-thieves mixed with them, are reported in Atascosa county and I reckon Sam is on the lookout for information in regard to them, to forward to Governor Houston. Sam is so well liked by the Mexicans of San Antonio that he has a good show to get news from them of any strange Greasers from over the Bravo, who are smelling about this way, for news in regard to our movements."

"There was one thing in connection with the bull-fight," spoke up Daring Bill, (Bill Thompson,) "that didn't, I reckon, get the notice I gave to it. Anyway I have heard no one mention having seen anything wrong about the deal clear through."

"Py tam, I dinks I vas dinking sumdings vas wrong," said Dutch Pete. "Put I don't vas kicks apout much ven I sees dings looks muleish. I keeps mine eyes opens all der same."

"I w'u'd like ter know what ther dickens you two fellers are drivin' at," said Jack Hodge, looking somewhat indignantly at Daring Bill and Dutch Pete. "Ef I has yanked ribbons, kicked brakes, an' snapped whips throu' gullies, hog-waller, canyon, an' clean perrara, dry an' wet, fur sum extended periods, I ha'n't got ther snap outen me yit, an' yer can jist chalk that down on yer way-bill, an' I rec'on Big Foot's blinkers are 'bout as sharp as a tiger-cat's claw, if he has meandered ther perrara an' bush 'til his scalp 's-a-gittin' mangy, and wood-ticks pass him by as tew tough ter hitch onto. No 'fense ter you, pard," said Jack, aside, to Big Foot, slapping him on the shoulder, "but it cuts like a black-snake (whip) ter have any one I go heavy on, as I duz on Bill an' Pete, think that I'm a warein' blinders, fur I stole away frum ther stable an' left Clown sleepin'—beg yer pardon, Clown!—an' foched up at ther long-horn show. Fact is I see'd it all, throu' a crack under ther frunt seats, fur I war lookin' like a Piute arter bein' dragged throu' a bog-hole, an' didn't want ther gasl ter gaze on me when my harness wear'n on squar' an' not 'iled up fur show."

"Never flare up 'mong friends, Jack," Big Foot said. "Bill Tom'sen never spits out anything ter hurt feelin's t'enshunal nur Pete e'ther; yer ha'n't gut ther whisk' outern yer skin yet, an' rare up too sudden like. Yer cu'dn't 'a' seen ev'rything goin' on thru' a crack, 'speshly when yer hed snakes crawlin' round yer boots

—ef they warn't in 'em. Ez fer me, I war over ter Mrs. Wells's, an' didn't throw my four bits intew a Greaser's pocket, ter see a few bulls on ther muscle. I has seen enuff o' that game loose on ther perrara."

"I'll speak for Pete, as well as for myself," now broke in Daring Bill. "I did not intend to say any one was thick-sighted; but there were a good many things to draw a person's eyes so they wouldn't see or notice any little thing like I refer to. It was when Sam stood in front of the bull, and the matadore was dying, he drew Mariana's head down, and whispered in her ear, at the same time by a look directing her attention to the spot where Lena Castro, the prettiest girl in San Antonio sat, with her father. The way I put it up was this: The matadore had biz with Lena Castro, and his death would bar the game of him—or his employer—for I know such a low-down bull-fighter couldn't have anything to do with a high-born Castilian family like the Castros. That this biz was of importance was shown by its being held as high as his religion. There was but a short breath between the communication and his last prayer, as he pressed his blessed medal, which hung to his neck, to his dying lips.

"Then, the next thing which impressed me, and stamped this more vividly upon my mind was this: as the bull made his last lunge at Sam this same Lena Castro gave a piercing scream, and went off in a dead faint. If Sam hain't got a soft thing on gaining the affections of Lena Castro, with all the blue blood in her veins and dubbloons around her ranch, as thick as sand-fleas at Point Isabel, then I'll never spread another lay-out, or sling a card."

"I'm a tam Tu'ch mule-triver, I knows," added Dutch Pete, "put I have seen all dat you dalks about, Pill; an' sum more, as dat. I watch dat tam pull-sticker ven he was so clost to Mariana, I cu'de shust shute dat Gre'zer if der pull 'adn't killed him an'—"

Here the whole party broke into a tumultuous roar of laughter, for Dutch Pete's language, and the vim he put into his words, told plainly that he had a soft spot in his heart, occupied by the Queen of the Fandango.

"Vot you makes any vays! Vat for you laughs, poys?" continued Pete, his face red with blushes and shame that he had shown his weakness to his pards. "I sees nothings to laugh at, minself. I dinks all you fellers likes der dance mit Mariana. Put, as I vas shpeaking, I vas vatching dot gal und Gre'zer und I sees he makes her take vun oath, look up in de sky und cross herself; und I says undo minself, 'sum drooples comes mit dis tam pull-fight;' und I dinks so now, all ter same; und I shalls all der viles."

"I hope to lose my next stake, boys," spoke up Fighting Ben (Ben Thompson), "if something exciting don't come out of it. I think as Pete does. When things commence in San Antonio as they did to-day, they don't end right away. We'll have a rifle of fun, see if we don't. When blood is spilled near the Alamo, even if it is Greaser and bull blood, there'll be sure to follow shooting and cutting of some shape, and I reckon we boys'll come in for a hand in the deal. Something's in the wind, or Sam would be here before this."

"I kinder kalcilate myself that Sam's a nosin' round fer news," said Big Foot, as he wiped his bowie, drank the last of his coffee and drew his sleeve across his beard. "Ef that are any thet counts toward a rumpus he'll git a-hold on it, bet yer sculp. I hain't seen such a great matter o' his company, but what I has, I'll be squar' enuff ter own, makes me hanker arter bein' with him frequent an' offen. As ter the danged Greaser a-kickin' ther bucket, that won't disturb my innercent seesters fur a single snore. Ef you fellars what ware up with Burleson has any thing ter sling 'bout Sam on ther trip, my ears is open, as ther reds say."

"Well," said Bill Lambert, picking his teeth with his bowie, "the first time I ever saw Sam was on the Main Plaza, just as he got his outfit and joined Burleson. He had bought Black Cloud from Martin Cam'bell—we didn't know the horse, or boy either, as it turned out. Our camp was at the San Antonio Springs, and five of us were going out."

"We bantered Sam for a race, thinking to have our own fun at his expense, he being fresh from the States. We all lit out; and, boys, may I never see my darling Lou, if he didn't get to camp, get his rig off and sit eating his rations when we got in. He never said nothing, or got the laugh on us by blowing to the other boys, and that made me like him from the start. When we got up to the Blanco Falls, not far from the Devil's Back Bone, the whole crowd there were, stripped for a swim, and some of the flats went to poking fun at Sam in regard to his verdancy as a Ranger. He got his blood up and dared any and all to follow him. We didn't know at first what he meant, but soon got our eyes opened. He took a run and made a flying leap off the rocks, down into the pool at the foot of the fall. It's all of fifty foot from the ledge; and nobody knew how deep it was, or how many jagged rocks there were hid away beneath the surface. We gazed down in wonder, never expecting to see Sam again; but up he came, very weak, we could

see by the way he swam, for he was under water a long time and—”

“Waal, I jest be dog-goned intew a continental cucumber,” interrupted Big Foot, as he moved from his seat to get nearer to Lambert. “Yer don’t go ter say Sam leaped offen that place an’ cum out piert on his pins? I has bin right thar an’ knows jist how things is situated.”

“Hold your horses, and I’ll tell you,” again commenced Bill. “He did come out O. K., climbed up an’ stood dripping and panting on the rock, with folded arms, looking defiantly, and contemptuously upon the whole crowd. Well—”

“Didn’t none o’ ther sapheads foller his jump?” again interrupted Big Foot.

“Yes,” again commenced Lambert, “five or six of us, Joe Booth, here, among the number. We felt as though we’d go it or get killed, and we made the rifle safe; but I don’t want any more such long jumps. When we got out, and again stood on the rocky shelf, we saw Sam wasn’t through yet, for he took a run away from the edge and then faced the falls. Capt. Burleson yelled at him not to go over again, but it done no good. He took a run, and I’ll be tetotally bamfoozled if he didn’t go over head-first and went down like a shot, straight as an arrow. He didn’t wabble a hair nor make a break in the water a foot wide. Well, I might as well say that nobody followed him, everybody stayed out of that pot. They couldn’t see him, you bet!”

“Bully fur Sam!” yelled Big Foot as he threw his battered sombrero into the air, the same falling into the camp-fire and being dexterously recovered and gracefully returned by Austin.

“Did ther danged soft soder, pusilanimus scum o’ ther clarin’s have any more ter say ‘bout Sam bein’ fresh, an’ green? I’d a’ gi’n slug ter bin thar. I’d a’ slung ther cusses over inter ther Blanco, an’ I be doggoned ter thunder ef I wuldn’t bin ockerd ‘bout it, an’ not so danged partic’lar ‘bout thar bein’ scarified when tha’ ware on ther whiz to’ard ther liquid.”

“They never bothered Sam but once after that,” continued Lambert. “Then his horse had been bitten by a rattlesnake, and he wouldn’t run ther animal after buffalo. For this his ability to kill one was questioned—this was when we furst got into the range—Sam left camp on foot with his lariat, six and bowie. He rode into camp next morning on a wild mustang he had snared and broke without saddle or bridle. He had a prairie twist on the nag’s under jaw with his lariat, and in that fix had run, killed and scalped the biggest, fiercest looking bull bison I ever saw—we come acrost the beast on the march next day—and he brought in the finest mop (scalp of the forehead) we took the whole campaign, and slung it, all bloody, into the face of the galoot who had been prominent in sneering at him, at the same time covering his heart with his six.”

“Did ther cuss wilt?” asked Big Foot eagerly.

“You bet, he wilted. There wasn’t a Ranger there but what would have made a lead mine of him if he had hurt Sam, and he knew it, and took a back seat. Fact was he deserted a short time after; when we got news the reds were coming down on us, thick and eager for hair.”

“I nefer likes ter dark so much wen I pees pudding avay mine rareshuns,” spoke up Dutch Pete. “I don’t can see how you vellers gets done mit your krub so quicks; put, as I vassay, I kude dells sum dales ‘pout dat Puckskin, vat vould makes you likes him sum more. Ven I dakes mine smokebipe sundimes, und der mulars bees all O. K. den I shpits overt dings pout dem dam red-skins vat vas drying von race mit me an’ Sam, und we pees in von waggon, mit six mulars vild as ter tyvel, an’ going dru dose bost-oaks, like sum ‘untred t’ousan’ tyvils. Mine skalp git grawling now, when I dinks ‘pout dat times.”

“Tugs an’ martingales,” exclaimed Jack Hodge, blowing a big whiff of smoke from his mouth and laying down his corn-cob pipe. “That must a’bin fun; I had a run in ther same fix up on Devil’s River when I driv’ fur George Giddings. Steve Speed war my outrider, an’ ther way he made his black-snake whiz round them thar mules’ hames ware a caution. Ev’ry lick brought a stiff squeel an’ jump; but we made ther rifle, an’ fetched ther station, with ther arrers jist a-cuttin’ the air round us. We never bu’st a buckle, an’ Steve an’ me each on us got a new Colt’s six, gi’n us by ther passengers, what had purty loose scalps fur ‘bout three mile.”

“I wouldn’t mind humpin’ myself round that same section arter a few ‘Pache sculps,” said Big Foot. “I’m gittin’ sick o’ wood-ticks, sand-leas an’ down-kentry Greasers; a change o’ water an’ feed wouldn’t set me back much ‘bout now. I has had consider’ble fun in ther ‘Pache an’ Lepan kentry,—‘Lone Wolf,’ that danged, smoky sun o’ Satan, with a gang o’ his butchers, run me a piert race, when I war on a lone scout, fur loose ha’r, onc’t. I had ter slip my nag an’ take ter ther rocks, scarifyin’ my huffs an’ shins right smartly fur yer knows I ain’t no Sinderilla. “I wear’n’t very ockerd,

nur slow, ‘bout cacheesin’ myself in a hole, like a Pacific Digger, right abuy ther river, which war good eighty foot plum, sheer down, an’ all chance fur biz over my head war just as risky. It war a close game, at long range, all ther artermoon, an’ I had ‘em all round me, thar he’d bobbin’ out frum ahind ther rocks, like perrara dogs; thar war right smart on ‘em gi’n ther death yell through ther hull game, an’ sum on ‘em dun sum tall old circusin’ towards ther drink, that war ‘musin’ ter witness. But ef it hadn’t a’ bin fur sum mustang snares, what I diskivered hid away in ther cave and what I spliced together; an’ slid down easy when dark cum, ter ther drink, it w’ud a’ bin a tough biz fur yours’ spectfully. I didn’t low ther dew ter fly much arter I got ter my nag; I took ther bottum ev a branch, an’ follererd er up fur sum consider’ble of a long shoot afore I got stampede speed on. I rec’on it war a long old yell them ‘Paches gi’n when light cum, an’ they seen ther lariats swingin’.”

“Dit you say ofer your brayers?” asked Dutch Pete, “did you bray to de pig Fat’er, or tid you t’ink all de times you gits away frum de reat-skins, Pig Fute?”

“That are sumthin’ I never ‘lows ter talk common ‘bout. Him what put me here, in his own good time will take me away,” answered Big Foot lifting his sombrero, and gazing skyward, with a reverential air about him, that the boys had never observed in him before. “I don’t make a show o’ my kind o’ Christ’anity, like ther preachers an’ them what squats in a church, an’ thinks ther way are all laid out, an’ paved fur ‘em ter kingdom cum—my creed are ter keep a clean trail; feed him as is hungry, if I has it; an’ help them what’s in tr’uble. My scripter are the plains an’ mount’ins, the rivers an’ bush; an’ what’s in ‘em. I ain’t ejudicated, an’ c’uldn’t read no other kind. Them’s good enough fur me, an’ I risks my futer on what they teach me.”

“Vat you dinks dem tam vild mulars deach anydings goot? Dey brays terripley, sundimes, und makes much drouples mit efferypoty. Ef you gets in de neighborhoof of dere heels, look ourt, lightennin’ quick, or dey preaks up your pissness. Dey pees de devils on de roat, or on de barara.”

Big Foot looked at first indignantly at Dutch Pete, as he made this last remark; but seeing nothing but earnest innocence in his face his features regained their usual stoical appearance, but the Rangers were forced to withdraw from the vicinity, and smother their mirth by a general drink all round from the springs.

Then Big Foot sat down by the side of Pete and inquired of him:

“Do them thar cussed mules make anything by buckin’ an’ kickin’?”

“I pets dey don’t,” answered Pete. “I gives dem de plack-snake vip like de debble, sundimes. No, dey makes nottings.”

“Wall, I rec’on that yer can l’arn a lesson frum even a mule,” returned Big Foot exultantly, “fer if yer go easy, glide along a trail without any fuss, or bluster, yer has got a show ter make things cum out bunk. Thare are a heap o’ men, jist as bad as a mule, allers in a muss. They git wusted ev’ry time, an’ don’t yer fergit what I’m spittin’ out, on this subjec’. I swan, it stren’thens my argement, fer if yer can l’arn frum a mule, yer can frum any doggoned thing what crawl! and Big Foot burst into a horse laugh, Pete joining in. This brought the boys back to camp, in wonder at the way things had terminated; for they had anticipated trouble from the way Pete had broken into the favorite religious platform of Big Foot.

Before the Rangers had reached the camp-fire the attention of all was drawn by the quick clatter of hoofs, and the next instant there dashed into the camp, Captain Phil Immeke, who cried in ringing tones as he drew rein:

“Rangers, I come to you from Buckskin Sam, who needs your aid, for San Antonio is threatened by Cortina the Swamp Fox and his band.”

One wild yell from the Rangers, and every man sprung for his horse, and five minutes after they were riding rapidly toward the Alamo Plaza, where they were to meet Buckskin Sam.

CHAPTER V.

THE BANDITS’ ATTACK.

UPON the arrival of the Rangers in the city, they found the houses and stores all closed, and darkness and silence rested upon all; but the shadows of night and the quiet were the calm before the storm, for armed men were crouching in secret recesses, awaiting the moment to move to combat, when Cortina and his band should dash in upon the town they expected to surprise.

Already had the town militia been called out, and the Vigilantes had done some deadly work upon traitors, as, in front of the house of the Catholic Priest, a dark form was swaying to and fro from the limb of a tree.

It is Contraband Jim, a noted horse-thief and desperado, whose fate had been quickly settled by the Vigilantes.

At the “Bull’s-Head Bar,” a party of Texans had gathered, and among them was Buckskin Sam, who was arranging with the town officers

a plan of attack, when Cortina should come into the town.

Presently, out of the mesquite bushes beyond the city, dashed a troop of horsemen, and entering the Plaza, they ride up to the Bull’s-Head Inn, and attempt to break in the door.

But with the first stroke the stout door flies open, and a dozen revolvers flash in their faces, and the battle is begun.

“The game’s afoot, boys; go in and win!” cried Buckskin Sam, and well did the Bandits know the Ranger yell that followed, and turn quickly to face the foes they had not expected to meet.

Mounted on his beautiful mustang, Black Cloud, Buckskin Sam led the charge upon the Bandits, and along the streets the fight raged, until the main Plaza was reached, and then the enemy turned to fly, for they could not face the deadly revolvers of the Rangers.

As Buckskin Sam was about to start in pursuit, he heard his name called, and beheld a man lying against his dead horse.

“Me speak with you—you Buckskin Sam,” he said with an effort.

“Yes, what have you to say to me?” asked Sam, seeing by the faint light of the rising moon that he was a Mexican and badly wounded.

“Me Pedro; you saved my life one time ca Nueces; me tell you many Mexican hate you, and want to kill you.

“Me at bull-fight in disguise, and set you save Mariana; the matadore was paid to kill you, and Mariana was to help him, and then we was to take Senorita Lena to bandit camp.”

“Ah! that was your little game, was it?”

“Yes; me speak true now, for me die soon.”

“You certainly are dying; well, go on, if you have more to say.”

“Keep your eye on the Senorita Lena Castro, for they mean her mischief.”

“Ha! who means her mischief?” asked Sam quickly.

“Don Brogado, the Landit Chief; me die now; good-by,” and the dying man closed his eyes and seemed anxious that death should come and relieve him of his sufferings.

As Sam turned away there suddenly pierced the air a wild shriek in a man’s voice, followed by a ringing cry for help.

It came from the direction in which the bandits had fled, and the next instant there dashed npon the scene a mule, flying like the wind and bearing a man clinging to him.

Quickly Sam’s revolver flashed and a bullet brought the mule to the ground with a heavy fall, hurling his rider far from him.

Springing like a panther into the air, with horror and despair in his countenance, he yelled:

“Mother o’ Mozes, don’t shoot ag’in, gentlemin! Sure, don’t ye see I’m afther surriderin’, an’ ‘avin’ avin’ a shillalah wid me to do yeess barrum? Wirra, wirra! phat a worruld!”

This speech was greeted with a deafening yell, which caused the Irishman to snake in his boots, followed by a burst of uncontrollable laughter from the party of Rangers which caused just as sudden a change of feelings in the person so unceremoniously introduced into their midst.

“I hopes ter be jambusted intew bash by old squaws, an’ fed by ther spoonful ter Piute pap-pooses, ef it ain’t Mick McFillinny!” suddenly shouted Big Foot. “Whar in ther name o’ Kurnil Krocket did yer cum frum, Mick? an’ what’s in ther wind ter make yer skute this-a-ways so almighty speedy an’ let loose yer music like a dyin’ panther cat?”

“Musha,” exclaimed Mick, panting with excitement. “Sure, ‘pon me sowl, I thought the hull worruld had gone crazy intirely. Faith, it’s yersel’S I was sure I was afther matein’ beyond here, an’ ridin’ like divile ye ware, as I came discenterin’ along, an’ I gi’n a rousin’ yell fer bare joy, whin bad luck an’ the divil catch tho spalpeens, whoiver they ware, they began to blaze at me wid pistols. Blood an’ nounkers, but it was an awful fright I got, an’ I gi’n the mule a prod wid me knife which made the divil of a baste mad as a hather, an’ afther raisin’ his heels to the moon as I put me arums around his neck, he tuck me like a true friend thro’ the whole batch, who ware afther goin’ t’other way as fast as Mick an’ the mule came this. Bedad, but ef the mule had stood still I’d a’ killed ther hole clutch o’ thim—yees needn’t ter laff. Sure it’s meself ’ud bin darin’ enuff ter do that same, but fer the bluntherin’ mule, what kicked me gun into ther bushes, an’ didn’t know fri’nd from foe.”

“Cums und dakes sumdings before dem vellers cumes pack, Mick,” yelled Pete, from the lager keg, which had been rolled out of a saloon for the benefit of the Rangers.

Mick cast an anxious glance toward the corner which he had just doubled at speed, then noticing the amused looks of the Rangers, he arose from his sitting position in an expeditious manner, just in time to escape the heels of his now recovered mule, which the bullet had only stunned; and drawing his sleeve across his perspiring brow, he walked stiffly toward Immeke’s saloon, and addressed Pete.

“Pon me sowl, Misther Pete; it’s not ye that wuld insult an’ Irishman, be offerin’

sich staff as that same. Me throat is afther falin' loike a tarantalar's nist, an' it's sumthin' what 'll make me lively I'm nadin', this blessed minite, afther the harrud run, frum the devil knows what they ware, bedad! Phat kind ev a row is this afther bain', onyhow, Misther Pete?"

"Vell, Mick, those pees sum of dem vellars, vat dink all de mulars an' hosses on der bararies pees their own, ven dey don't done got von pranting iron petween dem, und dey dries to get som' frients ouvert ob de courut house, put dey gits wusted in der game. Here pees sum goot schnaps; drinks it all, it vill do you goot."

Mick dashed down the glass of whisky, as if he was used to that kind of liquor, and only regretted that his throat was not longer and his capacity greater for taking in and consuming a larger quantity.

CHAPTER V.

THE REST ON THE MEDINA.

The cause of the onslaught upon the town was the arrest of two of their number, whom the bandits had sworn to rescue. One had been hung, however, and the other was still in the hands of the authorities, anxious to see the end. Sam and his Ranger pards the next morning rode into town, from the camp at the San Pedro Springs and arrived at the Military Plaza at the very moment that Marshal Burns opened the jail door to Mustang Bob, telling that celebrated horse-thief and desperado that he was free to go on his way, much to the surprise of the prairie outlaw. The Plaza swarmed with armed men, stern determination marked upon their countenances; and as Bob gained the Court House door, which opened upon the Plaza, and this, to him, fearful sight met his eye, he read his doom.

Over the way he saw another foreboding sight which sent the blood from his face, leaving it of a deathly pallor—Counterbrand Jim swinging from the gallows tree.

The instant Bob's foot pressed the threshold the cocking of hundreds of rifles, shot-guns and revolvers broke ominously upon his ears, and full of fear he staggered against the door.

But he braced himself, recovered his presence of mind, and glared, like a wild beast at bay, into the thousand piercing eyes; among which none showed a ray of mercy.

"Hang me, gentlemen," he cried, "if you will; but, for God's sake don't shoot."

This strange request was made not because he preferred to be hung, but because he thought they would take him outside the city to execute him and then there would be a chance for his friends to rescue him. As Bob yelled out his request he gave a glance behind him. The jail door clanged, and the cell, from which he had gladly walked, and into which he would now have eagerly returned, was closed to him. There was no refuge; there was no outlet for escape; and with another wild, fearful yell, such as is seldom heard from human lips, he sprung into the Plaza, from the Court House door.

A huge bowie-knife, in the hands of one of the Vigilantes, flashed before his eyes.

He grasped the blade firmly in his hand, but it was wrenched cut, cutting the hand clear across to the bone, while half a dozen brawny hands grasped him and held him firmly, panting and struggling, and led him slowly through the densely packed Plaza, to the south-east corner, where stood a mesquite-tree, which had often served for the dread purpose before. The vast crowd was still as death, and naught was heard but the cowardly pleadings of Mustang Bob. A lariat with running noose was thrown over a limb, the fatal loop quickly adjusted, and the time allowed for prayers spent in wild cries for mercy.

"Time's up, Bob," spoke one of the Vigilantes, in a stern, firm voice, holding his watch in his hand, and marking the time as coolly as for a race.

It is an ugly sight under any circumstances to see a man hung; but when that man spends his last moments in cowardly pleading, cries for mercy, and struggles for life, then it is most horrible indeed.

So it was with Bob. Quite a serious scuffle occurred before his feet were tied fast and he swung clear from the ground, his body spasmodically twitching up and down and the blood flowing from his wounded hand down his clothing and spattering the earth below.

Not until the last gurgling gasp had been given—the last tremulous twitch of nerve, did the vast crowd heave a sigh of relief, and speak in whispers, which ran through the observer unused to such scenes like whispers from the lips of death.

Before the Vigilantes had reached the fatal tree Buckskin Sam turned Black Cloud quickly, and facing his Ranger pards, exclaimed in a low voice:

"Pards I've lingered here long enough. I'm off on a lone scout to the Medina river, to see if I can pick up any information in regard to this raid. If you boys lay around San Antonio forty-eight hours you'll see or hear from me. *Adios, camaradas!*" and touching his sombrero, Sam guided his steed slowly through the crowd,

the good wishes and adieus of his pards being given silently.

Cantering down a side street Sam turned south before reaching San Pedro creek—then, in a wild gallop, suited to his spirits, he sped on through the Mexican portion of the town, greeted from more than one casa with compliments from silvery tongued señoritas, and in five minutes was dashing like the wind clear of the town, through the mesquites, on the down river trail toward Mission Concepcion.

San Juan, San Jose and Conception Missions were left far in the rear, the bridle reins hung loosely over the horn of his saddle, Black Cloud needing no hand to guide, while his master, with his Sharp's rifle in the hollow of his left arm, inspected each clump of mesquites, with lightning glances.

Still onward, with no slack in the headlong gallop, kept Black Cloud, until the timber which fringed the Rio Medina came in view. There Sam and his mustang entered the dark shades, and came to a halt upon the bank, under an immense live oak, literally shrouded in Spanish moss and vines.

Just by his side, as Sam sat upon his horse, hung a large festoon of moss, drooping from the branches overhead.

This was grasped by our hero, and its meshes carefully parted, showing in its center a bright, scarlet river flower, fresh plucked and wet.

A look of pleasure and surprise overspread Sam's features as he placed the flower in the coils of the glittering snake which served as sombrero band, and he gave an expectant glance upward.

There came a rustle from among the moss and leaves, and down a huge vine glided an Indian warrior, who grasped the hand of our hero, pressed the same to his heart, and then stood, with folded arms, his eagle plumes mingling with the swaying moss.

Silent as a statue stood the Indian brave, his left foot forward, his massive breast swelling with conscious strength and pride—a perfect picture of symmetrical beauty, a god of the forest surrounded by Nature's most lavish and luxuriant beauties. His buckskin leggins were fringed and embroidered in bead-work; the silken sash, to which the leggins were attached, and which also served as breech-cloth, was of the finest kind. A single strap, only worn by a chief, highly ornamented, passed over his shoulder, down to the sash, and supported paint-bag, bullet-pouch and scalping-knife. Naught covered the dark, bronzed skin, from the waist up, save a bear-claw collar, clasped about the muscular throat. The eagle-feathers of his head-dress were as black and somber as the long locks which fell behind, to the waist, ornamented with richly engraved silver plates, which spoke of raids over the Bravo.

For an instant the eyes of the Indian inspected the surrounding shadows, then rested with deep affection and friendship upon our hero, who sprung from Black Cloud, leaving the animal at liberty to browse at will.

One moment red and white gazed into each other's eyes; then Sam quickly drew his bowie-knife, whirled it over his head, and hurled it with great force, burying the weapon to the hilt in the turf between the feet of the Indian, who, as the steel flashed in his eyes, never winked, or moved a muscle of his stoical face.

Then Sam, pointing at the hilt projecting from the earth, exclaimed in a voice of earnest friendship:

"Thus, Warlula, do I bury the knife, and with it all thoughts unfriendly or suspicious. You are my brother. I now know you to be true as the steel beneath your feet. Houston, the great father of Texas, has said it, and his tongue never tells a lie. His tongue is not forked."

A beam of pleasure overspread the countenance of the Indian, his form became a trifle more erect, his bosom swelled with gratified pride, and he answered:

"Tonkaway tribe true to father of Texas—true to Rangers—Warlula heap glad Buckskin his brother—know big sun come when no clouds—know Warlula come when trail clear—Buckskin friends, Warlula friends—when heap bad Mexican tie Warlula tree—try make tell where Rangers—spit in Warlula face—then come Buckskin—shoot quick—cut loose—save Warlula life—no care life—want die in fight—no care be kill by Greaser dog—want be shoot in fight—go on long dark trail, plenty scalps—it is enough when Warlula forget Buckskin—then sun go black—moon come no more—here friend totem!"

Plucking one of the long eagle-feathers from his head-dress the Tonkaway placed it in the sombrero band, by the side of the scarlet flower which had told our hero of his return from a long, lone scout, and his presence in the tree.

Sam now took from his pouch a letter and gave it to the Indian, saying, in explanation:

"This paper talk is from Houston, the great chief of Texas; and in it he says, 'Warlula, the Tonkaway, is brave to a fault, true to the death to Texans, and no lies nestle upon his tongue. No better trailer between the Red and Bravo, and I have known and called him friend and brother for years.'"

"Heap good talk from Great Chief!" ex-

claimed Warlula, proudly. "Houston great warrior—paper talk much good—lay on heart when go on long, dark trail—when lay down in big sleep—Great Spirit know Warlula heart white—say Warlula go happy hunting grounds—never dry, never tired, never hungry—it is good—Warlula heart glad."

"I wish half of the white men were as honorable as you are, Warlula. But to business. When we parted you volunteered to show your gratitude for the service I was glad to do you, by getting some information in regard to the movements of different parties who make this section a dangerous place for a ranchero to locate in. How is it? Have your eyes been open, and are your moccasins worn thin?"

"Warlula trail go through thorns of Bravo—his eyes have been open—Greaser dogs on war-path—many bad white men with them—trail point San Antonio—my white brother has seen them—he has heard the thunder of their guns—a little bird told Warlula big fight on Plazas—death-howls have filled the air on Alamo."

"Warlula is right. The little bird sung a song of truth in his ear. Many bad men, Mexicans and white, were shot. Counterbrand Jim and Mustang Bob now hang like dogs from trees on the Plaza. We can stake out our mustangs and not be obliged to sleep with the lariats in our hand."

As Sam spoke of the desperadoes being hung the Tonkaway shuddered; his tribe believing that such a death debars an Indian from the happy hunting grounds forever.

"Then you found out nothing in regard to any other parties except those who were so badly whipped last night?" inquired Sam.

"Warlula moccasins make many trails—he has seen more—so many," indicating fifteen by opening and closing his extended fingers. "Greaser dogs camp down Medina—camp there,"—pointing east—"no go with others to San Antonio—when night dark Warlula crawl like snake—hear Greaser dogs talk—say kill Buckskin for Monterey Mexican—get heap gold—say steal Senorita San Antonio—get heap more gold."

"Where are these Greaser cut-throats now, Warlula, who are so anxious for my life? I'll give them a chance to take it if they think they can."

"When sun come, short ride—when mustang go fast—see camp quick; no there now, gone San Antonio—Warlula no break word—come meet Buckskin—no follow trail."

"This is all the news you have then, my red brother?"

"Warlula got more talk—plenty sign on Rio Bravo—big chief of horse-thieves there—got many warriors—Cortina heap big camp—Burgos Mountains."

"What's that?" exclaimed Sam, in surprise. "You have not been so daring as to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico alone?"

"Warlula swim Bravo—Warlula ride fast, ride long for friend."

"Give me your hand again. I'm more than satisfied, I'm proud, to call you brother; and will say, in true sincerity, you do sling yourself around the country about as lively as electricity."

"Who be?" exclaimed the Indian, quickly, "Big warrior?—much fight on war-path?"

"Yes," answered Sam, laughing. "He's the biggest chief in our nation, and rides like the lightning in the skies."

Warlula was satisfied he had been compared to no small fry.

"Well, my red brother, I must return to the city by way of that Greaser camp. I want to run in on their trail if I can. Do you need anything? I see you are rigged for council in gay style. Reckon those fancy tricks haven't seen much service."

"Leggins make long time—hide in nest up there," pointing up the tree. "When go on trail got more—much bead no good on war-path—Warlula want nothing—kill deer with bow—no make noise like rifle."

"When shall I see you again, and where? You need rest for some time to come."

"Warlula never rest—no say where go—sometime here—sometime there—keep eyes open—Buckskin see red brother when no think—Warlula watch trail of white brother—maybe so save scalp."

Sam gave a low whistle and Black Cloud came dashing up to his side, rubbing his nose affectionately against his master's shoulder.

The hand of white and red met in a warm, friendly grasp, which spoke more than words; eyes met, reflecting heart-glances of mutual regard, and Sam sprang into the saddle, waved his sombrero over his head and then dashed down through the bottom timber toward the Greaser camp, leaving the Tonkaway standing beneath the swaying moss with sinewy arms folded over massive breast, gazing after his white friend.

For a long time stood Warlula, his eyes fixed upon the bushes, which had been dashed aside as Sam sped down-stream. All was silent except the ripple of the river, and the gentle whispers of the zephyrs through the mossy draperies.

Suddenly the Indian's head turned toward

the north, his whole aspect changing to quick action; his breast swelled, his nostrils expanded like a race-horse's at the starting signal, and he sprung up the trail Sam had made coming from San Antonio. Upon reaching firm ground he threw himself prone upon the earth and rested his ear for an instant against the sward. Then, with a step as light and cautious as a panther stealing upon its prey, Warlula arose, returned to the tree, bounded up among the branches and disappeared.

Five minutes after the Tonkaway had secreted himself there came to his ears the swish of branches, and panting of hard-riden steeds.

Peering from his look-out he observed six fierce Mexican cut-throats ride beneath the tree, dismount, and examine the ground where, but a short time previous, Sam and himself had stood.

"Caramba! the cursed *Gringo* has again escaped us!" growled one of the party. "Surely El Diablo guards well his *muchacho*."

"Por Dios, senores," added another. "Los Indos has met the Texan. Scalp-Taker is in league with el hombre Colorado."

"Si, senores, it's plain as *el camino del Rey!*" spoke up one, who had been up and down the stream, intent upon the sign, and who, from his authoritative manner, was evidently chief cut-throat of the gang. "Carajo! the cunning Texan has gone toward our last night's camp, and Los Indos has pointed a trail up the river on foot. His trail is as light as a chaparral rabbit's. Our course is plain. The Indos is a runner. He has gone to the ranchos at the ford, and will return alone. Here his life trail must end. Diable! I have an idea! This must be the same red-skin the young Texan cut from the tree, in our camp on the Bravo, when he shot so many of our men. Gaspardo, you will stop here. You know the red dog, and never show me your face until you bring his ears with you. Senores, come! we follow the white boy who shoots faster than the lightnings of the Gulf. The doubloons must rattle in our pockets when we attend the next *danza* in Monterey. Gaspardo, remember! your *carrabina* shoots well—meet us at Mission Conception to-morrow, with the ears of the Tonkaway. Adios!"

"Adios, compadries. Mil gracias, capitán. I have ridden long and fast, I need rest. It is well. I can shoot a Tonkaway as well as a Gringo." And Gaspardo led his horse away to a small, clear spot; removed the bridle, and secured the animal to a limb.

As his comrades went galloping down the trail made by Sam, he seated himself behind the long festoon of moss, which hid him from the sight of any one coming down the river. Then he took from his pouch tobacco and shucks, and making a cigarette, commenced deliberately to smoke, a habit to which his class are so chained that they will indulge in it even when it endangers their lives.

As the bandits rode away, leaving Gaspardo, Warlula sprung from limb to limb, far up into the tree, to an ingeniously constructed hut, made of reeds from the river, woven thickly together, and secured to the limbs of the tree. Here he procured a long, stout lariat.

Returning to his former look-out, directly over the head of the Mexican, the Indian fastened one end of the rawhide rope to the limb, and, with great care and caution twisting his limbs about the rope, began sliding slowly downward, his long scalping-knife between his teeth. Gaspardo's attention, from some slight noise up the river, became attracted in that direction, and the cigarette between his thumb and finger burned close to the flesh, causing him to throw it quickly from him and mutter a deep curse.

Warlula took advantage of this distraction, and sliding still further down, hung just over his head, the sombrero of the bandit shutting out from sight the awful avenger swaying above.

The fingers of Gaspardo were buried again in his tobacco-pouch, when right before his eyes swung a long, glittering knife, held in a muscular hand of bronze, the steel gleamed only long enough for his dull brain to fully comprehend the sight. The bright blade described an upward curve, cut the air with the velocity of lightning, and was buried to the hilt in the breast of the bandit. One long-drawn groan of mortal agony, and Gaspardo fell backward, his death-stricken eyes seeing for an instant a revolving figure in the air, and the next moment Warlula stood before him, his eyes flashing with the war-spirit of vengeance.

"Greaser dog, sing death-song—no more spit Warlula face—when tie Warlula to tree like dog, Warlula say kill some time—Warlula never lie!"

Stooping, the Indian drew the long knife from the breast of the Mexican, the blood spurting in a dense stream upon the sward, and Gaspardo, with another deep groan, crossed himself, muttered a prayer through his ghastly lips, and was dead.

Quick flashed the blood-dripping steel around the head of the dead man and with gory scalp in one hand, knife in the other, held high in air, Warlula, with a wild, weird dance, and guttural

song of exultation, whirled around his victim for a moment. Then at length, seizing the body he dashed it with great force through the branches, and it disappeared with a plunge and splash beneath the waters of the Medina.

Then he glided quickly up the tree, but almost immediately descended, stripped of his finery, holding a Sharp's carbine in his hand, and with the long stride peculiar to his people vanished amid the underbrush, down the river, on the double trail of the bandits and his white brother.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT AT MISSION CONCEPTION.

LESS than three leagues below the Alamo City, on the bank of the San Antonio river, there stands one of the many hundred Catholic Missions, built a century ago, which are found in every city and town of Spanish origin, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in fact many of them stand isolated from settlements, and bad, in the old time, under their control, vast tracts of land, over which roamed countless herds of cattle, horses and mules.

In and below the city of San Antonio are four of these ancient and imposing structures, in a good state of preservation. They are named respectively: the Alamo, San Juan, San Jose, and Mission Conception.

The reader's attention is called to the last named, upon the night following the day on which our hero had the interview with Warlula the Tonkaway, on the banks of the Medina.

It is the midnight hour and a hazy moonlight lights up the scene.

Approaching the Mission Conception from the north its dome, and towers loom up to the sight while in front is a small opening, which extends from the back walls of the Mission to the narrow line of pecan trees, which fringe the stream, or form the bottom timber. Many of the out-buildings, the dormitories of priest and nun, are fallen to decay, and the adobe debris, is scattered on the ground. All that remains of the north wing is the front wall. What formerly were the windows are now gaping, unshapely holes.

The trail coming from the south, leads north to San Antonio, passing directly in front of the Mission, and is somewhat higher than the ground inside of the wall, as there were at one time vaults beneath the wing, which have caved in and been but partially filled with the crumbling adobe falling from the walls above. This has made it a dangerous place, seldom trod by foot of man or beast.

The main Mission is a massive structure, the walls near three feet in thickness, with but a few narrow windows and niches for saints, to break the plainness of outline. The roof is nearly flat, with the exception of the dome; and the walls stand breast high above the roof, with projecting eave-spouts in the old Spanish style of architecture. It was and is a fortress of no little strength, and easy for a few to defend against a host unless cannon were brought to bear upon its walls. In dangerous times it has a place of refuge, as well as a house of prayer.

At the time of which I write it had become a rendezvous and hiding place for bandits, thieves and desperadoes; and the white man who would loiter about its ruin, especially in the night time, must have put little value upon his life.

The murmur of the beautiful San Antonio river, laughing, plunging, and rolling its crystal waters over its rocky bed, sounds soothingly sweet. The noble pecan trees lining its bank interlace their branches, and call on trailing vine and moss to assist in lovingly shading from the scorching sun by day, and the cold stare of the moon by night, the dearly loved waters which nourish their roots, but here and there the silver rays filter through the verdant screen, and turn the rippling waterlets into shimmering silver.

From the river to the far-off prairie on either side stretch out mesquite motes, and through them, at full speed comes Buckskin Sam.

He holds his Sharp's rifle at a ready, and his eyes wander nervously about the shadows of the trees, and the old ruins. By the labored lope of the mustang, it has been a long and fast ride they have had; but there is no falter in speed until a gentle word from Sam brings the horse to a halt in the middle of the opening, in the rear of the Mission. Then Sam springs to the ground. Again his eyes rove about the borders of the opening. With suspicious air he makes a circuit round Black Cloud, his rifle resting in the hollow of his left arm, his right thumb pressed upon the hammer, and ready for instant use.

Nothing but the music of the waters, and song of the insects of the night, strikes his ear. Naught but wood-shadows and somber ruins meets his eye.

It is evident that Sam only intends to make a short stop, for the purpose of resting his horse; for he merely loosens the girth, and slips the bridle bit, to allow the animal to feed from the rich, curly mesquite grass which covers the opening.

Laying his Sharp's rifle upon the sward at a half-cock, Sam pulls some of the grass from the

sod and rubs off the reeking sides of Black Cloud, who still pants hard from his exertions.

The inspection of the bandit camp and trails, after leaving Warlula, has kept our hero longer than he anticipated, but he is now on his way to San Antonio, to rejoin his Ranger pards, at the San Pedro Springs. While Sam was engaged rubbing the foam and perspiration from his prairie steed, speaking low words of encouragement, well understood and appreciated by his dumb friend, the latter suddenly jerked up his head, stopped chewing, the grass hanging from his lips, and with a low snort gazed intently toward the up trail, north. Sam quickly recovered his rifle and stood by the side of his faithful mustang, every nerve and sense of each strained to the utmost.

They heard the dull clatter of horses' hoofs, coming in a desperate gallop toward the Mission, the sound increasing until our hero distinctly interpreted the din to be occasioned by a number of horsemen in pursuit of one who was some distance in the lead.

Sam instantly decided that mischief was in the wind, and slipping the bridle bit into the mouth of Black Cloud, he vaulted into the saddle. Man and mustang were, for a moment, silent as statues, with heads bent forward, and eyes and ears intensely strained to solve the cause of the alarm.

The thundering clatter of hoofs now sounded clearly upon the ear of our hero, who estimated in his mind that full a score of horsemen were coming, at break-neck speed, but he was totally ignorant of the nature or nationality of those he had decided to meet, be they friend or foe.

Suddenly the sharp report of a pistol broke on the midnight air, followed by a piercing shriek of terror from feminine lips, there was a flutter of snow-white garments through the mesquite motte at terrific speed, and then, just as Sam was about to dash toward the trail, a sight met his view, which drove the blood surging back to his heart.

Through one of the embrasures, in the ruined wing of the Mission, not fifty paces from his position, sprung, in a wild, desperate leap, a night-black mustang, with a young maiden, pale as death, clinging in terror to the flowing mane of the animal.

As that fair, white face was, for a fleeting instant, presented to his view, the long raven hair flying away from her brow with the wind formed by the lightning-like leap as the moon, for that brief instant, lit up the classic features, Sam recognized Lena Castro, whose shriek had drawn his attention at the bull-fight. Then, mustang and rider sunk in a ghastly crumpled heap.

Like a meteor Black Cloud plunged toward the ruin, and Sam sprung to earth.

Dashing over the crumbling heaps of adobe, he grasped the senseless form of the young girl from off the disabled horse, who lay with broken limbs, amid the debris of the walls, and bore her to clear ground, laying her by the feet of his mustang.

Then, drawing his bowie-knife, he returned, and to save the animal from useless suffering buried the steel to the hilt in its heart.

As he sprung away from the dying mustang, back to the prostrate form of Lena Castro, and his impatiently pawing steed, loud yells and maledictions in Spanish, mixed with clattering hoofs, close at hand, broke upon his ear. Regaining his saddle, he leaned over to earth, steadying himself by placing his left heel under the cantle of his saddle, and lifted tenderly the senseless form of the lovely Castilian girl from the sword.

Sustaining Lena Castro over his left arm, Sam drew the bridle-rein over the horn of the saddle, being able to control Black Cloud by word of mouth and pressure of limb. Then grasping a Colt's navy six in his right hand, he was ready for the cut-throats, who now dashed up and crowded the holes in the ruined wing of the Mission.

As they caught sight of Lena in the arms of Sam the sharp, quick detonations of the latter's six shooter sounded in their astonished ears; and the leaden messengers of death caused six of their number to either fall dead or wounded from their mustangs. With deep, loud curses mingled with yells of pain, they drew back for a moment.

"El Mochacho Diablo!" cried the bandits, as they leveled their escopetas and fired. Their shots were wasted on the empty air, for Black Cloud, as Sam emptied his revolver and pressed his knees in signal to the steed, sprung like an arrow shot from bow around the corner of the Mission into the south part of the opening.

Right in the middle of the opening he jerked the bridle-rein, bringing Black Cloud back on his haunches until they almost rested upon the sward. In his front came the bandits, who, on the previous day had just missed meeting him during his council with Warlula, and who had been on his trail since that time. Right in his front they came dashing through the mesquite motte like mustangs in a stampede, upon the Scalp-Taker of the Llanos and the Lily of the Alamo; while around the south wall of the Mission, on his flank, charged the remnant of the pursuing party, maddened by the fearful

Buckskin Sam.

havoc so lately made in their ranks by his fire through the sashless windows of the ruined wall.

Sam's face was pale, his teeth set with the desperation of a tiger at bay as he whirled Black Cloud about, and dashed the spurs cruelly into his quivering flanks. Off like the wind they bounded north, toward the deep and dangerous *asque*, the yelling horde of yellow-skinned devils close in their rear, and the zipping bullets cutting the air above and around them.

One tremendous bound and Black Cloud and his burden cleared the *asque*, or irrigating ditch, and Sam, with nimble fingers, half unwound his silk sash and bound it about the slender waist of Lena Castro, resting her form over his hips in such a manner as to shield her in a measure from the flying balls and enable him to use both arms in the coming struggle. He knew the bandits, even if they had to skirt the Mission, could overtake him before he could reach San Antonio, burdened as he was and his horse almost broken down by hard riding.

Lena was safely secured. The sight of her upturned face, so innocent and ravishingly lovely, added to the deadly hate he bore toward his foes and nerved his arm and brain to carry out the desperate resolve born on the instant.

Black Cloud was once more turned toward the Mission. The bandits, balked by the—to them—impassable *asque*, were huddled in a mob upon the south side of the deep ditch as Sam, to their extreme surprise, came toward them like a thunderbolt, holding with firm grip a deadly revolver in each hand, taken from his holsters.

His long hair flying in the wind, his eyes glaring hate, his mustang snorting and straining every muscle of his sinewy frame, he came like an avenger.

For a moment they gazed in wonder, not unmixed with fear, incapable of action.

In that moment the Texan yell burst from Sam's throat, as flying over the *asque* he landed in their midst, his revolvers flashing fire and sending death on all sides.

At this instant the Texan yell burst once more on the air, and sweeping down from the river bottom came "Reckless Joe," to the assistance of his lifelong pard, who, cutting safely through with his fair burden, met him half-way between the river and the bandits—who were now forming for a charge *en masse*.

"By all the gods of war and love, Sam, I find you in a *pretty pickle!* That muslin must be worth its weight in gold for you to take such desperate chances to protect it. How's this, do yonder base, craven abortions of the aborigines think to banish the buckskinned knights of the Lone Star State. Come on, ignoble ladrones, we'll send you to so warm a clime that henceforth you'll renounce your favorite seasoning of chill Colorado. Sam, you freeze to that angel in muslin, and I'll go it alone against the cowardly curs."

Saying this Joe spurred toward the Greasers, but his mustang had not gone ten feet before the bandits in line charged down upon the two Rangers, with fierce, vengeful yells, flashing their long knives in the air, as they had not had time to reload their old-fashioned escopetas.

It was like the continuous flashes, of the vivid lightnings, seen during a storm on the Mexican Gulf. The fire spurted from the revolvers of Sam and Joe, lighting up the scene, and bringing the combatants into a mingled crowd of cursing men and prancing, fear-stricken mustangs. Many saddles were emptied; many wounded sent up groans of anguish from the trampled, blood-stained sward; many mustangs, maddened by wounds, dashed here, and there through the bush with wild snorts; but there were enough of the miscreants left to hurl themselves upon the two brave Ranger-boys. Steel clanged to steel; a stiletto flashed before the eyes of Sam; hissed through the air, penetrated his cheek; and striking his teeth, crumpled two to atoms, fracturing his jaw. At the same time a carbine struck him on the head, and he reeled and sunk among the slain, dragging Lena Castro, who had revived during the melee, with him. Her arms were wound about his form, as if her life and salvation depended upon him, while terror and despair were depicted upon her countenance.

Reckless Joe, fighting like a hero, was knocked senseless from his horse, after receiving a stab in the leg from one of the wounded bandits, who was dismounted. One burly ruffian tore loose the fair girl from her now powerless protector, and vaulting into his saddle, with a yell of triumph, bounded southward.

Two of the ruffians leaped to the ground, to make sure work of Sam and Joe, when the wild war-whoop of Warlula broke upon their ears, followed by a shot from his carbine which killed the bandit, who already held the glittering steel over the heart of Sam. Like an avenging spirit from an unknown world came the Tonkaway chief, and his scalping-knife found a home in the heart of Joe's would-be murderer. Springing upon the back of Black Cloud, who stood by his fallen master, whinnying and pawing the earth, Warlula again sounded the war-cry of his tribe.

Thus sat the Indian, gazing after the fleeing bandits, master of the field, the wild war spirit filling his eyes, and eager for the blood of those whom he knew it was useless to follow alone.

The surprise of the bandits had been great when "Reckless Joe" put in his voice and arm; but when Warlula, in his own war-paint, and sounding his war cries, came upon the scene they were appalled, and right willingly followed their chief, who bore away as captive, one of those they had risked so much to secure.

Lena Castro gave one look of despair at the pale face of Sam, who lay amidst the slain, with the blood welling from his wounded face; and then, as she was carried with great speed, hugged tightly in the arms of the bandit, all hope left her. No mercy or pity could she see in the brutal faces of her captors.

Had Sam been captured instead of the Spanish girl there is no doubt but that Warlula would have followed to the death. As it was, he loosened quickly a gourd from one of the saddles; and procuring water, commenced to bathe the head of Sam and Joe as tenderly as any woman. Meantime he muttered words of vengeance against the yellow dogs, or gazing around upon the slain exultantly, sung songs of praise for his white brother, whose recent desperate situation and valiant defense made him more than ever an object of reverence.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMING BACK TO LIFE.

WARLULA without stint laved the wounds of Sam and Joe with the cool water, making several trips to the river for a fresh supply. Upon returning from his last trip to the river the Indian observed Joe sitting up, supporting himself with his hands upon the earth before him, with a dazed, half insane look upon his features.

Upon seeing Warlula approach Joe became somewhat excited, and crawled along until he came to a dead mustang. Leaning over the body of the animal, and bringing the revolver which he had found on the ground to bear upon the Tonkaway, he exclaimed with a hoarse, wavering voice:

"Who art thou, bold warrior, that thus approacheth the victor of this bloody field?—Comest thou with fell intent, toward thy peer in all things? Comest thou with murderous thoughts revolving within thy feather-bedizened, paint-daubed skull? If this be thusly, warble sweetly upon the midnight air thy death-song; procure a through ticket to the happy hunting-grounds of thy tribe; give a farewell gaze upon the works of thy father, Nature; for, although sorely wounded, and somewhat mixed, and concloberated, I think I can lay out thy noble form. Joseph, be true to thyself. The Last of the Mohegans stands before thee. Son of the forest and prairie, die!"

Vainly the wavering arm strove to bring the revolver to bear on the Indian. The iron tube described circles in the air, the weak finger spasmodically pressed the trigger as Joe fell back in a dead faint, and the contents of the pistol were buried in the dead mustang.

Warlula's quick perception saw Joe's condition, and he was ready to evade the shot, should the latter succeed in bringing the sight to bear upon him.

"Joe heap big brave—no know Warlula—heap sick—lose heap blood—Greaser cut deep?"—muttered the Indian, as he continued to act the Good Samaritan.

Warlula soon had gratifying evidence that Sam was still alive. His heart beat feebly indeed, and he uttered heavy sighs. Placing him in an easy position he returned to Joe, who soon recovered, under the cold water treatment of the Indian, and opened his eyes.

"Avaunt, foul fiend!" cried Joe; "and quit me sight! But, stay!—methinks there's some mistake—or thou wouldest long ere this have artistically removed my skull-cover, ears included. Hast thou a strawberry on thy right arm? Ay, dreams! and such dreams as would stop digestion and make each nerve within thy flesh to creep and cringe, to coil and squirm, like fire-singed serpents! What, ho! guards?" and Joe sprung to his feet, his hands clutching wildly in his hair, and staggering like a drunken man, supported by Warlula, he gazed about the scene of the conflict.

The whinny of Black Cloud drew Joe's attention; and just by the horse the loved form of his pard, "Buckskin Sam," lying upon the blood-stained earth, near a heap of dead bandits.

Joe feebly brushed the hair away from his brow, and assisted by the Indian gained the spot, and knelt by his side, exclaiming in deep

emotion as he grasped the hand of his fellow Ranger:

"I remember all now, Sam, old boy. You are not dead, great God in Heaven forbid!"

Suddenly turning, and grasping the arm of the Indian, Joe demanded: "Speak if you have a tongue, man! fiend! devil, or—no, forgive me. I know you are a friend, and as such tell me, is my poor pard, who sailed the sea with me to this wild land, who has slept for years under the same blanket, who has divided his last drink of precious water on the burning sands of the Llano Estacado—tell me, is he dead? If so, bear me ye gods of war! for every hair upon his head a Greaser dies; and these hands, which have so oft been grasped by him in friendship and brotherly love—these hands shall know no rest until he is avenged!"

Weak and trembling Joe raised his arms skyward, as he ceased. The Indian for a moment looked at Joe with awe; then, understanding by his manner and words his deep affection for Sam, which found an echo in his own heart be answered:

"Buckskin will live—the Great Spirit is good—my white brother no die—go on heap trails—kill more Greasers—kill more Comanches," and the Indian gently pressed Joe down to a sitting position, while he dressed Sam's wounded face in a primitive manner and bound up Joe's thigh with a silken sash, taken from one of the slain. Soon Sam moved restlessly, breathed heavily, opened his eyes, and, in a feeble voice exclaimed, as he recognized Joe and Warlula, who each held one of his hands; "Howdy, pard, what's up?"

Then, as he suddenly changed his position, and the blood flowed into his mouth, the events of the night flashed back upon his brain, and he sprung to his feet, gazing about the mesquites, river bottom, and Mission, his eyes brightening as the joyful whinny of Black Cloud struck his ear, and he felt his faithful mustang rubbing its head against his shoulder.

"Sam, old pard, shake! Put it right there!" cried Joe, overjoyed. "I'm not blushing to say that there's been a salt spring bu'st out in both me optics, and me cheeks are damp yet.—Sure as shooting I was dubious about your ever again bestriding your noble steed. I thought your trail had come to end, you certainly look as though you'd been badly murdered. I'm cut deep myself; but don't show the butcher's work as much as you do. Never say die, Sam, till this chicken has lost his comb, head included. I'll sell out for a string of suckers when you pass in your checks."

Then turning to Warlula, Joe added: "Come, thou representative of a fast disappearing race; dost see yon tower and battlements? Hie ye to its uppermost pinnacle and shout the war-cry of triumph! Ring the loud tocsin; for Samuel and Joseph still live, although the republic of Mexico has vomited its hordes of ladrones and assassins over the Bravo to blot out our existence from this mundane sphere and the red tribes of the West have at several distinctly well remembered occasions almost interlaced their digits in an extremely affectionate manner amid our flowing locks while they gracefully carved the atmosphere before our optics with their glittering scalping-knives! I repeat it, sir. The Union must and shall be preserved. The geese that howled at the gates of Rome shall trample the proud banner of England in the dust, and the British lion shall crawl, like a woodtick-covered coyote, beneath the gigantic rock of Gibraltar there to die, ay, die. Hang out your banners on the outer wall when you see me come. Gentlemen, I have the honor of representing the Lone Star State, before this august body. I'll oppose this measure to the bitter end. I'm a warrior, and peace troubles the regular gliding machinery from which me thoughts find birth. Horatio, I would rest. Wrap me up in pleasant dreams; waft me to lullaby lands."

During the latter portion of his mixed oration, Joe had stepped upon the carcass of a dead mustang, and interlarded his speech with various well-timed gestures, which, in spite of wounds and grim, ghostly surroundings, caused Sam to laugh; but Warlula, not knowing Joe personally, thought surely he was singing his death song, and listened without a muscle moving in his stoical face.

"Come here, Joe," said Sam. "I really believe if you were condemned to be hung you would spout Shakespeare, or somebody else, on the scaffold. Come here, I wish to make you acquainted with my red brother—as white a

Buckskin Sam.

man as ever wore paint, or sounded war-whoop. This is Warlula, the Tonkaway. You have often heard Gen'l Houston speak of his faithful services to the State. Warlula, this is 'Reckless Joe,' my brother by long association on sea and land. We were together when little boys, far away, a thousand leagues in the land of the north, where the rain comes white like feathers, and covers the grass from sight; where the leaves on the trees fly away on the wind, and leave the branches bare, the same as in the land of the Sioux and Blackfeet."

The Indian and Joe grasped hands and having buried steel in friendship, gazed into each other's eyes with mutual regard, knowing by that glance that each would be true to the other.

"Now, we have wasted time enough; to business," exclaimed Sam impatiently. "I don't understand why those Greasers did not make sure work of us, when they had the chance. When did my red brother come to the Mission? Did Warlula see the Greaser dogs take away the white Lily—a pale-faced maiden? Our council ended on the Medina, how came my red brother here?"

"Warlula follow trail—Greaser dogs come Medina—Warlula take one scalp—follow others—they ride fast for Buckskin—Warlula ride fast on trail—maybeso save scalp of white brother—come quick here—heap big fight—Greaser knife Buckskin—Greaser knife Joe—Warlula sound war-whoop—shoot quick—save Buckskin—cut Greaser heart—save Joe scalp—Greaser ride fast south—that way—have white squaw—Warlula stay—maybeso Buckskin go on dark trail—Warlula heart sad—now heap glad."

Before the words were half spoken Joe and Sam had grasped the hands of the Indian, their eyes speaking the thanks which, by his manner and character, they knew he would not allow their tongues to utter. They were filled with surprise and gratitude, and truly appreciated the heroic efforts of the Indian and his well-timed charge in their behalf.

As Sam clearly comprehended the state of affairs, and the pale, pleading, innocent face of Lena Castro was reproduced in his imagination, as he last saw her, he became aroused to the necessity of rescuing her from the bandits before they crossed the Rio Grande.

One thing was plain. Their trail must be followed to ascertain what ford they were pointing for. Neither Joe nor himself were equal to the task, wounded as they were, and grasping again the hand of the Tonkaway he exclaimed:

"Warlula is the Buckskin's brother. He saved the life of him and his friend. The Great Spirit has seen it and he will cause his rifle to shoot straight, and game in plenty to hover around his trail. Warlula has done much, but I know he will do more. The Greaser dogs have stolen the white 'Lily of the Alamo.' Her white-haired father weeps with grief. His only child has been torn from his old arms. All he holds dear is now being taken toward the Bravo in the arms of a bandit to be hid away from his old eyes forever—perhaps dishonored. They stole her this night, and by some means she nearly escaped upon her mustang, which leaped to his death through the windows yonder. Your white brother tried hard to save her from them, but numbers prevailed against my two arms, and they have her again. Your white brother has met her but twice, yet he claims her as his sister, and has sworn to save her at every hazard. My brother Joe and myself are wounded and weak; we cannot follow them tonight. Warlula will follow the yellow-skinned thieves, and see to which ford on the Bravo their trail points. My heart tells me my red brother will do this."

Before Sam had ceased speaking the Indian had loosened a lasso from one of the saddles, and coiled and held the loop. Then as one of the riderless mustangs, frightened by the coyotes which were now prowling around the field, came dashing past, he threw with the quickness of thought the circling noose, and bringing the slack end about his hips to add his weight to his strength, brought the mustang to a sudden halt, answering at the same time Sam's last words in his laconic style:

"Warlula will follow Greaser dogs."

He gave a run, hauling in the lariat, hand over hand, grasped his Sharp's rifle from the earth, and sprung into the saddle.

Bringing the slack end of the lariat with a 'hirl' over his head he lashed it about the

mustang until it sounded like the hiss of a whip-snake on the run, and the mustang sprung southward on the trail, disappearing among the mesquites, with the pursuit yell of the Tonkaways echoing and re-echoing about the ruined walls of Mission Conception.

"What do you think of my red pard, Joe?" asked Sam, as the cry of the Tonkaway died away on the night air, and our hero seated himself upon the sward, quite exhausted from excitement and loss of blood.

"Think," answered Joe. "By the beard of Mahomet I haven't had a chance to frame a thought since I had my snooze broken up in our little cabin yonder. But any one with half an eye, or half a thought, could see that he's a man every inch of him, from the last stitch in his moccasin to the tip of his eagle plumes; I'd trust him to the death, and that's more than I would say of any white man on such a limited acquaintance."

"The Greaser who gave me a knock on the head must have struck me with a bee-tree, for its been on the buzz ever since."

"The Tonkaway gave me a good bathing in the waters of the San Antonio. The water from that stream would fetch me back to biz as quick as any liquid this side of old Leominster, for its fairy wavelets kiss the lilies on the shore where dwells my dulcina. And speaking of Martha, my fair one and true, brings to the front an idea which has been playing circus around my somewhat disconglomerated brain-box ever since I struck this field of carnage. Where did you first meet this fair Castilian belle, that you take such a life and death interest in her? I thought your heart was iron-clad and case-hardened. What will the love-sick, languishing creatures who flirt their beribboned, bemusled, fairy forms about the *danzas* and *fandangoes*, to gain your smiles for one brief moment, do when they hear of this risking of your life for this hitherto close-veiled, convent-lived daughter of a Castilian Cresus?"

"I care nothing for what they say or do, if they let me follow the trail I have laid out for myself," answered Sam. "I owe allegiance to no woman, and thank God I can say I never wronged one. Bless them all, I think too much of them to link my wandering, adventurous fate with one of their number I am wedded to justice and humanity; and a man having these grand objects in view can find plenty of chance for practice in righting wrong, in saving innocence from being down-trodden by brutal lust, and blotting from the earth those who would disgrace even the wolves of the prairies by association, but who call themselves men."

"As to my being in love—you know me well enough. Were this girl the daughter of the lowest ladrone who frequents the Bull's-Head, and bets off his children's last rial at monte, I would follow the trail just as eagerly and just as far."

"But the boys say, Sam that she's dead in love with you. You know she fainted when that bull tried to rush into your arms like a long lost brother."

"I am well aware that this Lena Castro is the same girl who fainted at the bull-fight; but have reason to believe that it was not my danger that affected her. The violent death of the matadore before her eyes was sufficient to unbalance the brain of so tender a flower, unused to the world; and, strange to say, this same matadore, who was killed by the bull, was a spy of the bandits, and paid to find out in regard to these Castros, and also to kill your humble servant. You see, I am hunted by paid assassins. The man who takes such an interest in me will, I hope, soon be known to me, if he does reside in Monterey. I gained my information from the dying lips of that Mexican I shot up the Nueces fight. The boys were going to hang him when I claimed him as my prisoner, and saved his life, though for a bad purpose, as it proved, for he was among the bandits shot on the Plaza. On my visit to Warlula, yesterday, I first became aware of another body of these cut-throats being about here. Coming back on their trail to warn Don Jose Castro of his daughter's danger, while resting Black Cloud here, at Conception, I heard a rumpus up the trail, and who should make a flying leap through the windows of the ruined wall but the subject of my thoughts, Lena Castro."

"I corraled her, put the broken-legged mustang out of misery and fought the devils she had escaped from after they were joined by the main party, who had been on my trail

from the Medina. How they regained the prize you know as well as I do. But how came you to arrive so opportunely upon the ground? I thought you were with the boys at the San Pedro Springs. If you hadn't come as you did I should have been a gone coon, as Big Foot would say. I owe you my life, clear and plain."

"Don't mention it. Not that I would deprecate the value of the same, but that I owe you more in that line than I ever can repay. The way I happened to be in this delectable region was this: I got lonesome in camp when you were away and had a presentiment of danger in connection with you, pard, so I put down the trail the other side of the river to our old cabin, which we built when we first struck Texas and when we practised shooting under old Grange's directions. You know it ain't a rifle-shot from here over the creek. Well, I was having a gay, old-fashioned snooze, tall snoring thrown in, I reckon, when the firing awakened me, and I went for 'Young Paint' fast, but he had strayed off the range. He got the spurs good when I did straddle him, and I didn't stop for brush, nor hunt for the ford. I come blind and got here, it seems, in time to do some good. Ay, me lord duke, the pepper-eating sons of the Montezumas, the self-appointed confisticators of Texas live stock, were about to annihilate you to the last grease-spot, when the war-cry of Joseph knocked them up a standing, and there they are. Hurrah for us! The Lone Star shines with an extra glitter to-night, Mexic maids will weep for those who will never return with the stolen doubloons of Texans. But, old pard, how do you feel? I think in forty-eight hours I'll be able to exclaim, in the patented words of William Shakespoke, Esq., Richard is himself again. Be ready to flaunt my banner in the breeze and dare them all to come!"

"Joe, you ought to have stopped in the Bowery. The stage has lost a glittering star, though the Lone Star is gainer by it. How would you like to drop into one of the Washington Market restaurants now and go for fried eggs, buckwheats and coffee in the old style?"

"Don't mention it, me lord," answered Joe, caressing his stomach. "Ordinarily I could devour about six of those hash-houses, minus the flunkies; but now I am rather delicate, as the gemine fenders say, although I wouldn't go back on a quart of strong coffee. That Tonk' ought to have been educated as surgeon. He bandaged my wound in style. How is it, pard? shall we ride to camp, or don't you think you could make the rifle? I observe me noble steed, Young Paint, is, as is his master's usual custom, laying in a goodly store of provender when he finds it plenty. This curly mesquite grass is more nutritious than corn. The boys will just howl with disappointment to think they were laying at the springs while we had such lively times. Ben Thompson will mention with distinct emphasis the names in rotation of all the gods of mythology, because he had no hand in the deal. Big Foot will prance around that camp and kick or chaw the bark off all the trees. Dutch Pete will spoil all his whips, whacking his mules out of pure spite at his being absent; and Austin will spill the next meal's sop (gravy) into his stove-pipe hat. Wake up, pard, the night grows old, and I hear the lordly crow of chanticleer from the dim distance, although it ain't very clear as yet. How the crow of a rooster will take a fellow back to his boyhood days. Sounds the same the world over, and makes a person as homesick as church bells. The latter don't trouble us much here, in this section. What's brewing in your noddle, Sam? Shake off the dull lethargy of wounds, privation and years, and sweep away all worldly obstacles in thy trail. Years is good, Sam. Not twenty years old and noted in Texas history—though it's a rocky road to Dublin."

"I am far from being asleep, Joe; but I am thinking of the dreadful situation of Lena Castro, at the mercy of those cowardly cut-throats. A brave man will never harm a woman, or see her harmed, but you do not know what those ruffians of Greasers are capable of doing."

"I know," answered Joe, "that if they are bribed to capture and take her to Monterey the man who pays for it will not shove out the doubloons, if she comes to harm. It is policy for them to treat her well. But come; this cursed air is tainted with the smell of blood, and the coyotes and buzzards impatien-

wait our departure. They are even now peering from the foliage with glittering eyes, gloating over their prospective feast of horse-flesh."

With some difficulty our two Ranger pards mounted their mustangs, made their way around the Mission to the trail, where Sam pointed the dead horse out to Joe, under the ruined wall, and then they proceeded slowly toward San Antonio, conversing upon the expedients to be adopted in the coming chase, after the bandits, which Sam, despite his wounds, had decided upon, and Joe had sworn by the Alamo's sacred walls to see him through, though Santa Anna himself, at the head of an army stretching from the mouth to the head of the Bravo strove to intercept them.

CHAPTER IX.

BIG FOOT BUCKS MONTE. MICK MCFILLINNY'S RIDE.

AFTER the excitement, incident to the execution of Mustang Bob, had somewhat subsided, the Rangers, headed by Ben Thompson, repaired to the Plaza House, to discuss with the many rancheros who had arrived in town, from different parts of the county, the whisky of Bob Caile, and the general situation of things on the south-western frontiers.

Big Foot, having imbibed somewhat freely during the day, meandered into the Bull's-Head, where he lost nearly every dollar that he had in his pouch, "bucking against monte," and then went wandering about the Plaza, thoroughly disgusted with civilization generally, and the monte part of it in particular.

He finally concluded, after nervously feeling in his pouch for the gold that was not there, to try and get even in some way.

With this determination in his mind he returned to the Bull's-Head, and leaning on the end of the table, behind which Charley Smith was dealing, he nervously inquired:

"I say, Charley, ar' yer game open ter hogs! I'm plum played out o' oro, an' plata, an' I lows ter bet my livestock flat, an' nary bar the door wunst."

A smile and an affirmative nod was Charley Smith's answer; and, with a pleased expression on his face, Big Foot began to bet his hogs on every lay-out thrown on the board.

Still the fortune of the game was against him. Steadily he lost, until the title to five hundred hogs had followed where his gold had gone.

Then Charley turned down the cards, as if an idea had suddenly struck him, and anxiously inquired:

"Big Foot, old boy, where are your hogs? I don't reckon you've got that many in town with you. If you have they'll spoil on my hands this hot weather."

The giant scout raised his sombrero from his head, ran his fingers through his tangled locks, and answered:

"Wall, Charley, them thar hogs are high-born, sassy, chuck full o' grit, an' powerful hard to corral. As ter whar tha' bees, I rec'on you'll find 'em—lowin' tha' hasn't scattered offa the range—spread roun' permiscus like, from my ranch on the lower Frio, clean ter the Bandard Hills. I hain't gouged out time fer two year, er sich a matter, ter mark the critters, but when yer draws a dead site 'hind on' fore, on a herd on 'em in that range, an' one on 'em has my mark, which ar' a two-thirds clip on the right ear, an' a Comanche split on the left, why yer kin jist haul in the hull pot, corral the entire caboodle, an' sashay hum with yer bacon. That ar' a fair an' square, straight up an' down bargain, an' I sees yer through, ef it comes to blood an' ha'r."

The wild roar of laughter from the bystanders, at this rather lengthy, "round the corner" answer, caused Charley to blush the color of a boiled lobster, but one look at the huge infant, who, in times past, had done so much to keep up his game, and whose whole-souled eyes looked down upon him in child-like innocence, unconscious of having done anything wrong in giving Charley a six months' furlough, hunting five hundred hogs, ninety-nine out of one hundred of which he would never find, as Charley was no more posted in post oak hog-hunting than he was in teaching a Sunday-school, calmed Charley down. I will here add, however, that Charley had considerable confidence in himself in regard to bush-whacking, (this expression was in use before the war), and subsequently hired two Mexicans, whom he took with him to corral the porkers,

but returned to San Antonio in three days, completely broken down by forced marches through the post-oaks, and without having caught a glimpse of any swine bearing the two-thirds clip and Comanche split, as a distinguishing mark. A frequent and exasperating question was often asked at his bank:

"Charley, are this game open ter hogs?" and the only answer that he could give with any satisfaction to himself was:

"I don't take any 'big-footed' ones. If I take any I take them flat, as a bet; and laid out flat on the table. I've got through hunting a stake among the post-oak bogs."

It was but a few minutes after Charley Smith had closed his game against all bristle-bearing quadrupeds, the monte-room being still crowded, when the sound of loud voices in the adjoining bar-room which opened on the street, the monte-room backing on the engine-room of the old Herald office—came to the ears of those who were engaged in or watching the games; a general rush was made into the front establishment. Upon the sanded floor in front of the bar lay the body of Augustine Birrara—a man known by everybody, and holding the position of City Marshal under Chief Marshal Burns—his cigarette still smoking between his teeth. The hands of friends soon tore the coat and shirt away from his breast, showing a small puncture, just over the heart, with but a single drop of blood upon the surface of the skin—the work of a deadly Spanish stiletto.

Judge Henson, who was present, upon questioning the barkeeper, Ernest Rhumell, ascertained that while the latter had his back turned, arranging some articles of ornament near the mirror, he had observed a man, whose features were partially concealed by a slouched sombrero, come in by the entrance next to the market, pass quickly across the room, deliver a sudden blow at Augustine, and then run out by the front entrance, going down the street toward the foot-bridge, Augustine reeled, staggered a moment, and fell to the floor. That was all he or any one else knew in regard to the assassination. No person was in the room except Ernest, the assassin, and the victim.

Was this murderer one of the bandits who had escaped death in the fight on the Plazas, and who secretly returned for vengeance on the city official who had been prominent in the conflict, or was Birrara a victim of a family vendetta? No one could say.

No attempt was made to follow the murderer, as all knew he could quickly elude capture by dodging into one of the many hijals on the street, or over the foot-bridge.

Prominent among the crowd about the murdered man were Fighting Ben, Big-Foot, Dutch Pete, and others of our friends; who were listening to every word and opinion, never losing a chance to gather information which might prove of advantage to them in their war against the outlaws. They were doubly interested in this case, as Augustine had been well known and highly respected by all the American boys in San Antonio.

Dutch Pete walked up to the bar, purchased two bottles of whisky, and departed muttering to himself.

"Tam dat pull-fight, und all dem tam dings, vat vas cums mit id? Much druples mit evry poty. I goes pack to de camp, liveerly quick, und waits dill dot Puckskin cum's. Den sum fun cum's mit him, I pets a dozen mulars."

Pete straddled his horse, which stood in front of the market, and galloped to the camp at San Pedro Springs, taking a pull at one of his bottles, now and then, on the run.

When Pete rode into camp he found no one there except Mick McFillinny, and Austin, the cook who greeted him gladly, as they were quite lonely, and anxious to know what had become of their fellow Rangers, especially "Buckskin Sam."

Pete quickly divested his horse of its equipments and led the animal to grass. Then, taking from his malettes, (saddle-bags,) a bottle of whisky, he held the same above his head triumphantly, and gave a yell that would have shamed a Comanche, and which caused the mules over the creek to jerk up their heads in surprise, Austin to knock his stove-pipe off against a limb, and Mick to drop his pipe, which he was lighting, and burn his fingers. Hastily inserting his digits in his mammoth mouth, and then shaking them through the air, Mick turned about with anger in his eye,

which suddenly changed to an expression of intense surprise, and gratification, as he exclaimed:

"Be ther big ould castle ev me gran'faather, who was, 'pon me Irish 'onor, an' Irish king! an' it's whisky ye are after havin,' misther Pete, God love yeest! ye alwi's was after bain' a dacint gossoon as iver whacked a mule—me curse on the craythers, it's a harud time I had a-tindin' them while ye ware gone, an' me legs is black frum a kick I got. Misther Pete, sure don't ye know I was alwis after havin' a tindher regard for yees, an' it's a d'rop o' the crayther ye'll let me swig, me darlant; fur, 'pon me sowl, I'm smothered wid schmoke an' dust."

"How pees dem mulars, und how dey vas all de vile I vas gone mit San Antonio?" inquired Pete, as he leaned against a tree-trunk and took a stiff drink, addressing himself to Austin, who tipped his hat in a respectful manner, his ebony features shining with joyous anticipation as he watched the bottle pointing toward the sky, while Pete, with a gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, poured down the greatest curse sent to humanity.

It was with some concern and many comical contortions of countenance that Mick saw his flattering speech utterly ignored. He scratched his head vigorously as he watched the upside-down position of the bottle for so long a time.

"Mar'sa Pete, de mules am scrumptious. Deir be'n in no danger of starbation durin' your sumwhat perlonged an' aggravatin' absence. Dat ungodliest ob all animiles, de goeh ear'd, mangy-maned paint (many-colored), done jist h'isted de lid offen dis chile's stewpan wonst, when Le dun stampeded past de fire, but didn't spill de b'ilins, or he'd never see Chuesday ag'in. Mar'sa Pete, I se not feelin' 'strawdin'airly lubly; gimme, arter dis gentleman, jist a leetle smell ob dat 'stingisher ob de billyousness ob all gentlemuns, ob ebry color an' inclinations."

Pete stood for a moment with a broad whisky-grin upon his face, intensely amused at the sudden importance to which a bottle of whisky had raised him in the estimation of his two peculiar pards.

"Vich you likes der pess, poys, dis tam Tuch mular triver, or dat tam pottle of whisky? Pees you mine freens, indeet?"

"Marsa Pete, you lassate my 'fectshuns to an elevated degree. I 'sures you I feels 'streamly aggravated at de insineration!"

Austin folded his arms and assumed the air and position of a much injured man.

"Misther Pete, duz ye take an' Irish gentleman, the descendant ev a king, to be the kind ev a mon what ye are after incinivatin'? Go way wid yer dirthy stuff, sure I'd not giv a hafer fur a hull cask ev it, and Mick strode toward the fire and picked up his pipe.

"Vell, poys, as ve wants no drouples 'pout id, I shoost preak dis pottle on de tree, dough it haf gost me swi-pits at de Pull's-Heat."

Pete raised the bottle on high, feigning to be about to dash it to pieces.

"Mither o' Moses, Misther Pete, don't be after doin' that. Troth the mon's gittin' crazy!" cried Mick, as he rushed back.

"Gollamighty, marsa Pete, ain't you 'criminating' 'nuff ter know we both am willin' ter breeve our last gasp fer yer on any 'strawdin'ary 'casion, an' why you dun go ter labor up our feelin's dis way? You 'pears ter be preshus portie'lar 'bout a small decockshun oh corn-juice."

Pete, having had his own fun, now passed the whisky to Mick, who, as he glued the mouth of the bottle to his lips, closed his eyes and rubbed his stomach with great satisfaction. He then handed the flask to Austin, who, with a very low bow, his hat under his arm, addressed Pete:

"Marsa Pete, I drinks ter de holesale prosairaty ob you an' de mules, and hopes yer will git a good wife, lib till yer eyebrows drag on de grown', an' yer'll hab chilluns 'nuff ter hold em up, 'sist yer on de road yer has ter go an' stampede eberythin', mules 'cluded, outen yer trail."

Austin drank copiously, while the hanging moss upon the trees quivered with the wild bursts of laughter from Dutch Pete and Mick; the latter executing a difficult Irish jig on the hard-trodden earth.

Our trio of friends in a short time became engaged in an exciting argument which wandered from one question to another until it finally settled down to a discussion of the ex-

tant and importance of the different nations from which each had respectively originated.

"Sure, ony mon that's asther knowin' onything, can't dany but phat ould Ireland are the jewel o' the worruld. Be jabus, she's asther bain' called be avrybody phat knows his mouth frum a badger's hole, the gim o' the saes! Bedad, but she's the granest grass, the brightest dazies, the bluest lakes, an' the purtiest mounthins. She's ther sw'atest buttermilk, giruls an' pertaties, the foigtenest b'ys an' cats, ye can shake out. Phat do yeess think England's Quane w'u'd do widout Irish b'ys to foight fur her? The back o' me hand to that victory, an' bad cess to the b'ys; fur it's thimsilves, an' ould Arin go braugb, wid ther grano flag spattered wid shamrocks, abuv' them, they ought to be whackin' fur! Troth, whin I thinks ev it I c'u'd chaw me own he'd off wid vaxat n'an' sorror. Giv' us a kiss off the mouth o' that bothle, misther Pate, I feels a vacancy in me sthomic', an' signs o' grafe wather in me eye. He-re's to me granfaather, the last King o' Ballyschlaven, l'ace to his ashes. Be the hole in me coat—I mane the big'est one—but I'll never again see his mone-mint—indade I'll be a lucky mon ef I sees me own in this land o' unsartintes."

And Mick lubricated his tongue again with his favorite beverage.

"Vell," began Pete, "I doun't vos knows much 'pout dot Irish eundry, but I knows ve makes enuff lager bier in Yarmany, dot you cuide dake dot liddle Ireland and swim id all apout in de bier, und not vas pees in der vay eider, mooch. Und ve cuide bilo upo de kase (or sheese,) und pretzils ober dot Ireland, vot ve makes, so high as neber vas dere a mounlen. Den ve nukses de Limberger scheese und—"

"Marsa Pete," interrupted Austin, "'cuse me, but my degesstin' melodeons am 'stremely del'cate, an' I has bin near dem towns in Garmany, whar day makes dat cheese; an' I 'clare ter Mozes, I smelled dem arter marsa'n' I done got clean ter Rome. Marsa Mick, spashatin' 'bout Ireland, did yer ever see or hear tell on de Giant's Crossway?"

"Treth I hav' that same. Sure I oftin hearud me faather tell o' me granfaather, the last King o' Ballyschlaven, havin' crossed ou it to France. 'Twas in bad rapare at the time, an' he cam' near bain' lost intirely, havi' taken a miss-sthep' into the wath'; an' the King o' France snt him home in the flite o' the navy, an' was asther giving him sathers o' j-wels, fur 'twas a darrin' fate, avin' as long ago as that. Thar's but few phat has re'd enuff o' history ter know that 'twas Saint Patrick binsilf b'il that bridge, ter cum over the say, an' tacho the true faith, in ould Ireland. Heaven bless him, foriver. Tip the bottle over at Austin, misther Pate; sure, the mintion o' the chaza made him sick, an' no wonther! He's a trifle pale, but it's not ter be supposed a thick-headed Dutchmon w'u'd cb serve it, whin he's thinkin' o' the fat gals squazin' grape juice on ther R'ine. Be the same tokin', ef it's nothin' but pretzils, an' beer, an' krout ye has ter talk of, I'm thinkin' ye'll giv' the crow ter the Irish cock. Hurrooh fer ould Ireland, an' ther last King o' Ballyschlaven! Take me back giutly, in a jaunting-car! Smuther me wid dazies, an' burry me where ther shamrock grows, on the banks o' Killarney! I'll die as aisy as a new-born babe."

Mick in his excitement leaped up and danced in a lively way about the grove, until Pete gave a warning whistle, and shading his eyes with his hand gazed up into the trees.

"Phat the devil are ye asther sayin', misther Pate?"

"Vun tam 'possum, vot vos peen schleelin' mit bis dail rount de limb. Giv' me vun gun, liverly, quick. I shoots him, und ve has vun goot roast."

Mick sprung to the fire and handed a rifle to Pete.

"Tam dat gun! de poys dakes de lock to be mented! Liow you dinks I shoots dot 'possum mitowert no lock on de gun?"

"Tum'ther an' tur! how the devil's the 'possum to know that?" said Mick, as he handed Pete another rifle. Taking quick aim the Dutchman brought his game, with a heavy thud, from the top of one of the highest trees.

"Pon me sowl, misther Pate, ye has a trifle too much potheen. Sure ony mon wid since c'u'd see the fall w'u'd a' killed him, wid out wastein' powther."

"Vell, I tells you vot I dinks, Mick. I

dinks you petter dake a trink owert der spring, your het vas gettin' thick; und den go change your bony do petter grass, vere he kan put sum more meat on dem pones."

"More mate on his bones, is it? Be jabers! but he has all he can take along wid him now. It's a harud-h'arted mon ye are, Pate, to wish the poore baste over-bardined."

"You yoost dakes kare you gits not ober-purtened, mine freint," muttered Pete, as he gave a knowing wink at Austin; and glancing to see if Mick was out of sight, continued in a guarded tone:

"Cum on, 'Ustin, I makes a liddle dalk mit you. Cum liverly quick mit de woots, und we has sum fun mit dot Mick, burty soon, py und py."

Mick soon returned to camp, talking to himself and gesticulating vigorously. On reaching the neighborhood of the camp-fire, where his view was unobstructed, he discovered, to his surprise, the absence of his comrades, who were seated in the bushes where they could observe every movement of the Irishman. The eyes of the latter, roving about the camp in an unsuspecting manner, suddenly became fixed upon the bottle of whisky which Pete had purposely left at the foot of the tree. Mick gave a leap into the air slapping his boots with his hands as he jumped, breathed out a low "Hurrool!" and sprung to the tree, grasping and hugging the flask to his bosom, first giving it a shake to satisfy himself that it still contained a quantity of O-be-joyful.

He lost no time in transferring a large portion of the whisky from the bottle to his stomach.

Then, for the first time realizing that he had done a mean trick and that Pete and Austin might, at any moment, return, he sprung to the spring and filled the bottle with water enough to make up for the quantity he had drank, wiping it off dry, and replacing it in the same position he had first observed it.

His eyes leered with cunning, and he slapped his own back to give himself credit for this well executed maneuver. Then he went to the further portion of the camp but could not keep his eyes from returning toward the fountain-head of his present elevated condition.

With much fuss and blarney, which sounded loudly through the camp, Mick now feigned to be just returning from staking his horse, thinking that the boys would hear him.

The deep potations had begun to tell upon his brain, and in trying to execute a difficult step in his lone jig he fell flat to the earth, much to the amusement of the watchers, who only had sufficient of the ardent on board to make them hungry for fun. After several attempts to rise again, Mick finally give it up as a bad job, and sat with his back against a tree indulging in a soliloquy:

"Mick McFillinny, are ye here? Prisen sor! Arrah, me b'y, ye'r here, fust at last. Sure, ye ware alwis behint before. Bad 'cess to ye, phat the devil was ye asther, st'alinn' me whisky fur? Stale yer whisky, is it sor? 'Pon me sowl the mon what says a McFillinny aver sthole—the mon what says a dacident ev the last king o' Ballyschlaven avir tuck a haper or avin' a sthraw frum ony one, will die suddent widout praste er prayer—Mither o' Mozes, I'd take me oath on the blarney-sthone, I've not had a schmell, avin', o' whisky ther day. Sthick to it, Mick: fur be the fa'ries o' Killarney ye didn't sthop long enuff fer smellin', an' yer mouth ware so harud at work yer nose had no chance at all, at all."

"S're navir mind, Mick, me b'y," patting himself on the head, "ther day will be asther cummin' whin ye can hav plinty widout axin' no favors. Wirra, wirra, but whar the devil are the b'ys? Sure 'twas a mane trick to l'ave me alone. Hurrooh fer ould Ireland an' ther King o' Ballyschlaven an' his— Phat ther devil's ther mather wid me? Sure thar was me faather was the sun ev me granfaather the king; an' I'm takin' me owth I'm a sun ev me faather. Bedad but I has it. Hurrooh fer ther sickond sun ev ther King o' Ballyschlaven—that's Mick McFillinny, all ther woruld over! Hurrooh fer the sickond King o' Ballyschlaven! Hurrooh fer Ballyschlaven, King o' the McFillinny's! Hurrooh fer the King o' ther Ballyschlavens, Bally-King! Hurrooh fer ther 'Schlavens! King 'Schlavens! Hurrooh fer ther Ballys! Hurrooh fer King McFillinny, Schlavenballyking! Hurrooh fer Mick! Hurrooh Bally! Hurrooh 'Schlavens! Hurrooh King! Hurrooh Schlavenvally—devil a smell ther day—niver sthole a haper! Hurrooh

Bally—" and Mick sunk to earth in a drunken stupor.

Pete and Austin now emerged from their hiding-places, laughing immoderately, and, walking into camp placed Mick in a more comfortable position, covering his face from the thousands of buzzing flies.

"Mick woot pe vun tam pat soltier dit he, ha! all de schnaps he coult trink. He yoost wents do sleeps effery dimes. 'Ustin, ve vill dakes annoder trink, hav zumdings do eat; den ve has more fun py und py, burty soon, mit Mick. I has plenty more dot schnaps mit mine sattle-pags."

"'Clar' ter grashus, Massa Pete," exclaimed Austin, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"Dat 'possum dun gone skedaddled. Thot you killed him, dead sure. Gollamighty I'z aggravated 'bout dat. Was goin' hab a 'stremely lushus stew outer dat debble; but I tells yer be gone sure an' sartin. Done tote hisself away frum dis dangerous lucallity."

"Py tam, vos det zo? Vell dem tam dings vill alvis fools ev'ryody. Muss pute dem riut indo de pot or dey goes und runs away mit demselves, shoost so soon dey dinks you not looks apout, und sees dem. Vell, dare vos no use do veeps 'pout id; ve can dake vun, dwo dotzen trinks in de blace of dot blagy 'bossum. Here vos luck, mine freent. Mick, vake up! Vas long dimes dem trinks petweens! Vct you says? Notdings? Vell, dot vos petter for you, mine moy. Take vun goot schleep! I sends you on vun long skowert, py und py."

Austin, between drinks, prepared a lunch for himself and Pete, while the latter perfected his arrangements for further fun with Mick, when the evening should set in, to shield, in a measure, anything which might appear wrong to the fuddled Irishman.

Mick's mustang was bridled and saddled for the road, and taken some distance into the woods north of the springs, where there was a small, circular opening, entirely free of trees or brush. In the center of this opening Pete drove an iron picket pin, with a swivel head; an extra lariat was secured to the end of the one about the neck of the horse, making some eighty feet in all, and the end tied to the swivel head of the picket-pin. This done, and explained to his table comrade—who rolled about the grass in convulsive laughter, much to the detriment of his tidy make-up—they returned to camp and partook of their simple prairie supper, washed down with the whisky so liberally diluted by Mick—the other bottle being held in reserve to carry out the proposed plan.

By dusk the camp was put in order, the horses and mules secreted to the south of the camp, and Austin, through Pete's direction, hid away in a tree, where, from his perch, he could observe things and enjoy the success or defeat of Pete's plans.

The latter then took the bottle of whisky which had not been thus far disturbed, ran to where Mick was snoring, and, shaking him about roughly, exclaimed in a voice of feigned fright:

"Wak' up, Mick! Wak' up! 'undred 'ouzen tyvles, wak' up!"

Then he gave a loud war-whoop in the ear of Mick, who sprung upright in an instant—and the next knocked Pete with a well-directed, powerful blow several feet, end over end, down the bank, the latter just saving himself from going into the stream by frantically grasping a bush. Recovering his feet, exasperated almost beyond endurance by the turn of affairs, and doubly maddened by the knowledge that Austin was a witness to the rather turn-table incident, he yelled to the bewildered Irishman:

"Got in bimmul, vot vor you duz dat! Ton't you knows dot tam Tuch mulars triver? Donder und blitzen, you preaks mine het und tam near preaks de pottle ob schnaps!"

Seeing that Mick did not yet realize where he was, or what he had done, Pete's ire cooled down, and he approached and inquired:

"How vos you feels, Mick, ole moy—foot?"

"Fale, is it, mon! sure, I sale loike I was asther bain' awake at Donnybrook Fair. It's mesilf has a rowlin'-mill, full blast, in me sthommeck; an' a cotton-mill, wid sax t'ousand sphindles, runnin' in me head; an' win'-mills hangin' on me ears. Fur ther luv o' God an' friendship, giv us a big dhrop o' that stuff ye has in ther bohel. Whar in the name o' since are we, onyhows! an' how came I asleep?"

"Dake vun trink, Mick, liverly, quick, an'

cum mit me. Tem tam reat-skins vos here wile you pees schleepin', und dakes 'Ustin, dem horses und mulars all away do der bararar. Cum."

Pete dragged the astonished and frightened Irishman through the woods, stopping in the dark shades to whisper caution and give him a drink, which, owing to the circumstances in which he found himself placed, was no small quantity, and fired up his nerves, sending a thousand conflicting thoughts in a wild stampede through his brain.

Dragging Mick through the bush toward the opening, Pete explained matters on the run.

"You sees, Mick, you shoost must ride dot mustang vot you gut. He vas all dot vas save frum dem tam Injuns; und you goes like der tyvel und dells dot Puckskin Sam, und der udder poys dey cumes here lightnin' quick und goes mit der drail. You haf ter goes mit der noots, or dem reat-skins dake off yer scalp."

Noticing a hesitancy in Mick to undertake the enterprise, Pete thrust the whisky bottle into his willing hands, saying:

"Dare, Mick, pe a goot poy, und rite quickly, und ven you gits tired, vy you dakes sumding strong to prace you up, vot you say, ole poy? goot?"

"Troth, I will that. I'll go to the end o' Texas fur the b'y's horses. Me sculp's on me head now, thunk God, an' I hopes it'll sthick; although thar is a power o' misery under it, an' I'm not in dape luv wid this worruld. Sure, I w'u'd wish me hair to go wid me, an' I'm not wantin' to be sint to me long home be red bathens me curse on them fur st'al'in' the hosess o' the b'y's! Where in t'undher's Austin? Sure the scalpers w'u'd not be wantin' a nagur."

"Tam id, I dells you dem reat-skins vos got him! Dey dakes him do cook up de mulars, I dinks."

"Powers o' pewther, vat'll we be doin' fur br'akfast the mornin'?"

"Got in Himmul! ve vants no breakfast af dem Injuns cum pack! Cum, quick! dare vas your hoss! Let dot rope trag; then you no cum pack ve can find dot drail easy," and Pete assisted Mick into the saddle.

"You petter keeps on de edge ter woots und you pees all riut. Hare vas ein goot plack snake vhip, giv dot hoss blitzen on de roat, so he goes like von tear."

"Where's me gun? Sure I've nuthin' to da find meself wid."

"Ef you sees dot Injuns, make dot hoss run away mit himself. You got goot pocket-pistol mit you."

Pete gave the mustang a kick, and at the same time Mick brought the whip around the animal's hams, who sprung wildly around the margin of the opening, held by the lariat hitched to the swivel-headed picket-pin.

Then Pete dashed into the bushes before Mick came around to the starting-place.

It was now quite dark, and the Irishman alternately taking a swig from the bottle on the run and lashing his horse to greater speed, was too muddled to notice that the animal was going full leap around in a circle.

"Hurrooh fur the king o' Ballyschlaven! Ould Ireland foriver, bad luck to the red nagurs, it's Mick McFillinny don't care a rush fur them! Take a dhrink, Mick! sure, it's the best haf o' Pete's whisky I hav ag'in, an' he'll be mad as a hathen whin he finds the other bothe is wather entirely!"

Away at breakneck speed went the Irishman, wild with drink and yelling like a madman, while his horse, knowing something was wrong with his master, was terrified at his forced circusing.

It was but a short time after Mick had started on his singular journey when Pete and Austin, disguised as Indians, sprung from the bushes with wild yells and fired half a dozen shots at the almost flying man and mustang. Then secreting themselves they roiled on the ground in a frenzy of mirth, as Mick every moment went dashing past, putting their imitation Indian yells to shame by his wild, unearthly: "Hurrooh fur ther King o' Ballyschlaven! Hurrooh tur Buckskin Sam! Whar the devil are ye, me b'ys! sure yeses are wanted at ther Springs! Be ther fa'ries o' Killarney but thay war asther n.o sculp entirely, so they war, an' it's not out ov danger ye are yet, Mick, me b'ye, an' av it warn't fur the Dunc man's courage how wad ye iver hev made the grand race wid the murtherin' spalpeens! Sure, it must be nigh to the b'ys that I am, an' ef they hear

me yell it's asther ther red devils they'll be! Whoop! it's famous wid ther Rangers this ride will make me! Hurrooh fur Buckskin Sam an' Mick McFillinny—ther Rio Grande Rangers! Hurrooh!"

The truly ludicrous ride of Mick, was thus kept up, the whisky meanwhile being fast transferred from the bottle to his stomach. His wild hurrah sounded fainter and fainter, and at last he fell forward, his arms clasped around the neck of his horse, which now slowed up, and gradually came to a stand-still.

Then Mick McFillinny, the descendant of the last king of Ballyschlaven, very ungracefully slid to mother earth and repose; while Pete and Austin fairly made night hideous as they rolled upon the grass of the opening, in an ecstasy of mirth.

CHAPTER X.

A JEALOUS FIEND—THE TALKING LEAF.

MADAM CANDELERIO's fandango, situated in the mesquite chaparral about one mile from the Main Plaza of San Antonio, was in full blast; and as brilliantly lighted as could be expected from tallow-dips and tin reflectors. A coffee-stand and monte-bank were drawing their share of attention in one end of the building, while the hard, trampled dirt floor was filled with gay señoritas, and a sprinkling of American, French and German girls. The men who were dancing were all white frontiers men, stage-drivers, herders and sporting-men of the Alamo City, a mixed crowd all armed with Colt's revolvers and bowie-knives, and in their shirt-sleeves.

Between dances, as no beverage was sold on the premises stronger than vino dulce for the girls, flasks were produced and passed here and there, amid boisterous clamor, through which the silvery laughter from the Mexican señoritas rung in a musical manner. Noticeable among the men was one who from his muscular frame, and symmetrical figure, would be picked out from any crowd as an object worthy of attention. He is clad in a red shirt, flowing collar, black pants tucked with high-legged boots, a very wide-brimmed sombrero, and is armed as the others.

This is "Overland Jim," the stage-driver; who calls Santa Fe his home, but takes a run occasionally down to San Antonio, to see his pals of the ribbons, Sam Scott, Jim Dodson, Jim Harding and others. He is evidently on "a regular jamboree," as he calls it, in loose harness, and hand in hand with an American girl, frail and fair, who sticks to him through every dance.

Overland Jim, since his arrival in town had been keeping company with Mariana Coyen, and those who know the latter prophesy trouble in camp.

Many of the men are bantering Jim at the easy manner in which he changes calico; but none dream of the consequences yet to come.

In the midst of the merriment a white-robed figure glides through the doorway, and then, for a moment halts.

It is Mariana Coyen, the heroine of the San Antonio bull-fight. As she appeared then, risking her life to ease the last moments of the gored torredor, there was a look upon her face almost heavenly; but now she appears a fiend incarnate. Her features are pale as death, her lips are drawn up, showing her pearly teeth grating together like those of a madened wolf, while her eyes are glowing with a wild fire, as they glare around until they fall upon Overland Jim and his partner.

Then, like a phantom of death she glides forward.

One moment Overland Jim is bending over the American girl, his arms about her neck; the next, Mariana, with flashing eyes and gleaming stiletto, sprung like a panther through the crowd. Her graceful bounds bring her immediately behind Jim and his partner.

With the quickness of thought, Mariana raises her left hand, and gathers the long, thick hair of her rival in her fingers, giving a violent twitch backward and downward, drawing the head of her victim over until the white throat lay bare before her.

Then the right hand of Mariana Coyen is raised in the air, her stiletto glitters an instant in the poor girl's face, and then drops on its murderous way. Across and through the fair, white throat it cuts its cruel way, a spurt of hot, red blood flies over the muslin of the

dancer, a horrible shriek of terror and agony comes from the pallid lips, and the girl falls into the arms of Overland Jim, a corpse.

With pale faces, in bushed horror the other girls huddle in groups, and shrink away from the blood-spattered spot.

The ghastly deed was done so quickly, and so paralyzed each and every beholder, that before the assembly could realize what had happened, Mariana, with a fiendish laugh, had glided out again, through the door, and disappeared in the dense mesquite chaparral.

This is no fancy sketch of what might happen, but a truthful record of what really did occur at Madam Candelario's fandango, as hundreds of people now living in San Antonio can testify. Mariana, who risked her life to ease the last moments of one, and took the life of another, in a cowardly, murderous manner, escaped all punishment for the latter brutal deed, save a brief imprisonment.

Fair daughters of Mexico! In your jealous rage what will you not do to him or her who comes between you and the object of your regards? In love or in hate who can surpass you?

Meandering through the bunches of nopal, or prickly pear, on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, above Eagle Pass, are a party of horsemen. In their midst is a beautiful female who although careworn with grief and despair, we recognize as Lena Castro. Those who guard her—so brutal and debased in mien—are for the most part, the same bandits we saw at the old Mission below San Antonio, though a few more of the same character have been added to their ranks.

All the men are more or less drunk; and a bottle of mescal is being passed frequently from one to the other—they are celebrating their safe arrival with their captive upon Mexican soil.

What care they for those of their number who now lie festering, stark and stiff, beneath the shadows of the Mission, torn by wolves and pecked by buzzards? They are so intent upon their plans for the future, when the heavy reward for her who is now being taken to their patron shall be distributed, that they do not observe that a man dressed in Mexican garb is watching them from a rise on their right.

To be sure, he is somewhat screened by the brush, but were they on Texas soil they would certainly be more watchful, and the spy would be seen.

It is evident he understands their condition or he would not be so careless. He keeps his post until the cavalcade almost disappears from view. Then, gazing up at the sun and raising his hand toward the same, he gradually allows it to drop in a line with the party of bandits. This observation made, he draws a knife and cuts out the form of an arrow from the bark of a tree near him, the front directly toward the course pursued by those he is evidently intending to follow at some future time.

Then, with a peculiar, long, swinging gait, he starts toward the Bravo, on the back trail of the bandits.

He reaches the Rio Grande, plunges in, and swimming to the opposite shore, disappears in a dense thicket.

He is gone but a short time, when the underbrush parts, and our red friend Warlula, in all his war paint and weapons, mounted upon his mustang, bursts into view and speeds away from the Bravo toward the Nueces.

We know now that the Mexican spy and Warlula are one and the same, and that he has, so far, been faithful to his white brother, "Buckskin Sam."

The hot sun pours down on the parched, cracked sward of the prairies to the south of the Rio Nueces. Warlula, the Tonkaway is coming as fast as his fagged mustang can bear him, toward the river of nuts, and it is plain to see that his animal, although short-bodied, and compactly built, has been taxed beyond his endurance, and can serve his red master but a short time longer. Covered with foam, discolored with blood from lacerated jaws, and scratches of the thorny chaparral, left far behind, and panting painfully, still he is urged on by word and quirt over the hot, dry plain. As they near the green line which marks the bottom-timber of the Nueces river, the mustang gives a low whinny of pleasure at the scent of water; and the eyes of the Indian brighten, for the throats of both are parched.

and their tongues swollen with maddening thirst.

The eyes of man and mustang are centered upon the verdant belt before them, which insures relief from their sufferings.

Suddenly Warlula jerks his horse upon its haunches; and the animal, standing almost erect upon its hind legs, its tail mingling with the prairie grass, snorts with pain and anger—pain from the sudden twitch upon the torn jaws, anger at being brought to a halt when nearing the cool water, and green grass, so madly craved.

What has caused Warlula to come to a sudden stop? He is as anxious to proceed as his steed.

His eyes are still fastened upon the bottom timber, and two moving specks, which have just sprung from its shade—specks resembling animals. They are horses—one ridden, one led—and are bounding through the tall grass which fringes the timber toward the open prairie and Warlula.

Who is the rider?

Travel through a dozen tribes and you would not see an Indian maid that could compare with her who comes at reckless speed over the plain toward the Indian, and whose appearance has brought him to a sudden halt since distance and the quivering, hazy heat that hovers over the surface of the prairie, mask her character.

She sits her horse as one who has spent years upon a mustang's back, moving gracefully and in unison with the motion of a spotless black mare, whose long, slender limbs and neck show speed more than endurance; whose flowing mane and tail, and glossy coat, show the animal has not, for a time at least, been used to hard service.

The Indian maid is clad in a complete suit of buckskin, fringed and beaded. A silken sash about her waist supports a Colt's revolver and Spanish stiletto; a Sharp's carbine hangs from the horn of her saddle; while upon her head rests jauntily a hat, still fresh and green, made from the ribbon reeds, plucked from the banks of the Nueces.

Her long hair, black as raven's wing, floats behind her eyes that now flash with pleasure—for she has recognized the lone rider afar over the plain. On her cheeks a faint blush shows through the skin, but faintly tinged by Indian blood and Southern sun. As we see her mounted and speeding over the plain, she forms a picture so fresh, grand and beautiful that it is worthy of the noblest artist's dream. The horse she has in lead is a powerful animal, whose appearance also shows long lingering in luxurious pastures.

Warlula and his mustang resemble, and are as fixed upon the pony as an equestrian statue of bronze.

Suddenly the lips of our Indian queen part in a joyful smile, and then the prolonged, shrill scream of a panther flies from them over the plain.

As this signal reaches the ears of Warlula he once more urges on his horse toward the Nueces.

The speed they are making brings warrior and maiden face to face in a very short time, and they gaze into each other's eyes, as those long loving and long parted.

Before a word is spoken by either the Indian maid loosens a gourd from her saddle and passes it to Warlula, who eagerly drinks, pours the cool water over his head and face, and then into the mouth and over the nostrils of his suffering steed.

Warlula speaks first, as is his right.

"Lulula has been at nest of Warlula—she has been on Medina—she seen the talking leaf—it is good—Warlula heart glad."

"Lulula has seen the talking leaf," answered the Indian maid. "She has been on Medina—talking leaf told her come to Warlula—she has come."

She raised a long, wide and still green leaf, upon which was punctured, with a thorn, a number of figures in a rough, uncouth manner, but still plain talk for the one for whom it was intended, and passed the same to the warrior.

On one end of this leaf was a rude representation of a party of horsemen, with sombreros upon their heads, one figure among them with flowing hair and skirts. Back of these, and apparently following, was a single horseman, whose eagle plumes proclaimed his character; and at the other end of the leaf, also headed toward those mentioned, was a figure mounted upon one horse, leading another. This figure

had long hair, a single plume as ornament, and held a bow and arrow in the hand which pointed toward those ahead.

This leaf, pinned with the thorn which had been the tool used to execute this rather artistic picture to a limb of the big tree in the Medina bottom, within whose branches Warlula had his nest, together with an arrow beneath it, which pointed toward the Nueces; at a particular ford, had been plainly understood by Lulula. It told her that her warrior was on the trail of Mexicans, and that she must follow with a fresh horse for him. That was all; and she had filled the bill.

Warlula tore the talking leaf to pieces, which he dropped in the prairie grass. Then turning again to the Indian maid he inquired:

"Did Lulula see my white brother—did she see Buckskin on Medina—did she see Rangers?"

"Lulula see no Rangers—she no see the white brother of Warlula—she rode fast—she came like the prairie dove to her mate—her eyes make her heart glad—she has not looked on the face of Warlula for many sleeps—Warlula has made nest on Medina—when will he come back to gladden the heart of his squaw—when will soft words fall from his lips—when will he walk in flowers, shoot deer and forget to sound war-cry?"

"When Lulula hear death-yell of Warlula," answered the brave, "then she know he forget war-cry of his people—he has sworn by Great Spirit to be true to white brother—Warlula tongue not forked—the voice of Lulula is sweet as the birds of Guadalupe—he loves to hear it—but he is not a squaw—he is a warrior—Warlula has crossed the Bravo—he must cross the big river again—he has long trail to go—then he find the lodge of Lulula—he will see her on Guadalupe before next moon grow small."

"Lulula will sit by her lodge and wait—she will ask the Great Spirit to bring Warlula back—the birds sing sweeter, the flowers brighten, when Warlula is at his home lodge—"

"Warlula will come."

As he spoke the Tonkaway sprung from his panting mustang and commenced to change its trappings to the lead horse, brought by his squaw.

"Sun soon go down in plain," he continued—"Warlula go back to Bravo—Lulula ride fast to nest on Medina—leave sick mustang here—he find grass, find water—Warlula catch him when come back from war-path—my white brother will come on trail—Lulula will see him—she will tell him Warlula watch Greaser dogs—trail lead Eagle Pass—maybe so Monterey—Warlula find where take pale lily—meet Buckskin on Mexican side Bravo—no time much talk on war-trail—Warlula say good-by."

Stepping to the side of the horse ridden by Lulula he pressed her hand to his heart, gave one look into her eyes, and exchanged a full for the empty gourd. Then he sprung upon the fresh horse, swung his quirt hissing through the air, as the pursuit yell burst from his lips, and again went speeding over the plain, toward the Rio Grande.

Lulula bent forward, with a yearning, anxious look upon her features, mingled with sadness and regret, until the form of her savage lord grew small in the distance. Then whirling her mustang, she turned on her trail, and went like the wind toward the north, crossing the Nueces. Without halt she lashed her mustang on for the Medina, to do the bidding of him she worshiped more than all the world.

CHAPTER XI.

A FATHER'S GRIEF.

SAM and Joe, upon their arrival in San Antonio, after the fight at the Mission, crossed the Main Plaza and rode down Commerce street, finding at that hour Plazas and streets quite deserted.

Arriving opposite the Commerce street stables, at Whittle's boarding-house, Sam climbed over the fence, opened the gate, and by that time Mr. Whittle himself, awakened by the noise, came upon the scene.

When he recognized his old friend Hall he hustled around, attended to the horses and then awakened the servants to prepare entertainment for our two friends, so much in need of food and rest.

When Whittle found that Sam and Joe were wounded he sent for Dr. Reed, who was a particular friend of our hero and was overjoyed to see him; after their wounds had been dressed by the doctor and they had partaken of a

rousing old San Antonio breakfast, they felt much better.

It was some time yet before sunrise, and Sam, anxious in regard to Lena Castro, crushed down the feelings of faintness produced by pain of wounds and loss of sleep, and proceeded to the residence of Don Jose Castro.

The old Castilian opened the door himself at Sam's knock, for he had not pressed bed during the night, and stood with tear-dimmed eyes and a countenance full of anguish and despair.

With a hasty salutation our hero grasped the old man's hand and gently pushed him back into the hall, and no sooner had the door closed behind them than Sam laid his hand on the shoulder of the old Castilian, saying:

"Don Jose Castro, you do not know me, I reckon, but that matters not. The words I propose to say to you will give an insight into my character."

"You have lost your daughter. Please to state to me the circumstances of her abduction as far as you know them, and who you suspect has instigated, or accomplished the villainous deed. Yet, in the first place, to set your mind at rest, I will say that my wounds were received in an endeavor to rescue and bring her back to your arms."

The old man grasped the hands of our hero and wrung them, while his eyes mirrored the thanks and gratitude his tongue refused from deep feeling to express.

A hasty, impatient gesture from Sam brought him to the point in question. Clearing his throat and drying his eyes he assumed a calmer expression and answered the former's questions.

"Don Samwell, I do know you. I saw you do a heroic deed at the bull-fight. I learned from my daughter of a service you once did her; and those things coupled with the information gained from my servants, were sufficient to prove to me that you were a worthy gentleman, before I gained the knowledge from your own lips to-night that you have suffered and fought for me and mine. I know I can trust you, even with a secret which has preyed upon my mind for years. I have reason to believe that my dear daughter, Lena, my only child, has been stolen—torn from my arms—by Lorenzo Brogado, my bitterest enemy, who abducted my beloved wife from my hacienda near Monterey, and who was also guilty of the death of my saintly parents. Lena went to a *danza*—a private ball—under trusty guardianship, as I supposed, last evening; and my servants were overpowered by mounted men, who, according to their story, placed my daughter upon a horse and galloped down the river with her. Several of my servants were wounded and one killed while striving to protect her. My heart is broken, and having had so much misery in the past, this great calamity has left me paralyzed and powerless, although I have gold to pay for the services of any who will endeavor to save my darling from the fearful fate that is in store for her. The city authorities have pronounced themselves unable to do anything for me, and I am at a loss to know which way to look for assistance. At least I was previous to your arrival. I now have a glimmer of hope, and would ask you to inform me when and in what condition you saw Lena. Ah me, I fear that I shall never see the loved form of my innocent child again." As he spoke the tears coursed afresh down the furrowed cheeks of the grief-stricken old Castilian.

"My presence here, Don Jose, ought to have led you to suppose that I came with a knowledge regarding your great loss. Listen and I will relate the circumstances and incidents which have brought me here this morning."

And Sam related in detail the fight, rescue and recapture of Lena Castro.

"I wish to state, for the relief of your feelings, that I have taken steps to have the trail of the bandits followed, by one upon whom I can depend; and also that I have comrades, ready and eager to pursue even to Monterey. I have registered an oath to either rescue your daughter or die in the attempt."

"My dear young friend, your words give me hope. You shall have all the gold you wish to carry out your plans, and if you succeed anything I possess shall be yours."

"I ask no pay for such a service. Indeed I would never undertake such a trail, were it not for the deep sympathy I feel for you in your troubles. If true Texan courage and perseverance amount to or can accomplish any-

thing, you shall yet clasp in your arms your daughter, pure and uncontaminated by the base villains who seek her dishonor. As to your gold—some of the boys may need some for ammunition, but I doubt if they will accept it from you, as their credit is good in San Antonio."

"Send them to me, Don Samwell. I will not insult your noble nature by offering gold to you; but trust I shall be enabled to repay in some manner your extremely unexpected kindness, and loyal friendship to an old man."

"Say no more, Don Jose! I bid you *adios*; for I must see my comrades, and shall soon be bounding over the trail, toward the Rio Grande and Lena."

"That God and the saints may watch over and bless your efforts, shall be my continuous prayer. *Adios, amigo mio.*"

A hasty shake, a glance from youthful but daring, fearless eyes, into those that were aged, tear dimmed and sorrowful, despite their faint brightening of hope, and the two parted.

Sam hastened back toward the Main Plaza, not noticing the form of a youth on the opposite side of the street, who, unknown to him, had followed his footsteps, and watched and waited for his interview to end, pacing up and down, with impatient steps, biting his lips with angry vexation, and fierce jealousy plainly flashing from his eyes.

Let us look at this intruder—or spy shall we call him—so that we will know him should we meet him in the future,

A soft black sombrero, ornamented with a silver star, is pulled down over his face, partly hiding his countenance, but we see enough to know, that he is a mere youth, with a sickly mustache, rosy cheeks, black flashing eyes and raven hair, hanging in wavy masses to his shoulders, over a richly embroidered, black-velvet jacket, literally covered with buttons. Slashed pantaloons, to match the jacket, are tucked into the tops of high, fancy boots, on the heels of which jingle the long-roweled Mexican spurs, with their little, tingling bells, so common at that time in that country.—A fine, embossed belt, with huge silver buckle supports a Colt's army revolver, and bowie-knife. Take him altogether he looks the dandy sport of the fandango, and monte-house; yet he is so young that one is forced to doubt in regard to his character. It is perfectly evident, however, from his manner, that he is extremely interested in the movements of our hero, and as he is on the trail of Sam the reader will know him if he puts in another appearance; but to be more sure of his identity before I leave him I will christen him, "Black Bravo;" and drop him, dodging the footsteps of our friend, Buckskin Sam.

From Don Castro's, Sam went immediately to Whittle's, where he found that Joe, who had taken a short siesta, was up and around, alternately poking fun at the Dutch girls in the kitchen, and spouting conglomerated English in Richter's bar-room, adjoining the boarding-house. A few words in Joe's ear and the latter was ready for anything which should turn up. The horses were brought around, having been well groomed and fed; the boys mounted, and by the time they reached the Main Plaza their passage was blocked by crowds of people who greeted them with loud yells, and hearty hand shaking; for the news of their deeds of the previous night had spread like wild-fire, started by the talkative Dr. Reed.

Both boys stopped in to see the doctor at his drug store, who promised them, if they paid strict regard to his directions about using his healing balsams, they should be ready to move upon the trail, without danger of inflammation of their wounds, in three days.

Three days!

It was an eternity to wait, and despite the warnings of the doctor they clipped off one third of the time, and in two days were in the saddle, moving upon the trail, and, at last, entering the shadows of the Medina river bottom.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RANGERS ON THE TRAIL.

A SCENE of Texans were on the trail, all of them having been of the party that was encamped at the San Pedro Springs.

Buckskin Sam, Reckless Joe, Fighting Ben, Daring Bill, and Big Foot Wallace led the van, while in the rear was the eccentric Dutch Pete, Austin and Mike McFillinny.

All were armed to the teeth, and five pack-mules, heavily laden, showed that they had

started prepared for a long scout. They were mounted on fresh, hardy mustangs, for some time corn-fed and grazed on the rich, curly mesquite grass that grew to the west of the Springs camp.

This was the force that halted beneath the huge, moss-decorated tree, so well known to Buckskin Sam. The intention was to fill their canteens from the Medina, and then to strike up-stream to the ford, and scatter south upon the opposite side of the river, to find the trail of the Greasers who had abducted Lena Castro.

But no sooner had the party in the lead halted, and Sam was feeling within the long festoon of moss, hoping to find some "sign" from Warlula, which would bear on the business ahead, when an incident occurred which kept feet in stirrup, and eyes bent with astonished looks upon the foliage above their heads.

Coming hand over hand down the huge stem of a grape-vine, from the dark shades of moss and leaves above, a perfect queen of nature swaying amid appropriate surroundings, was Lulula, ravishingly lovely in her romantic, beaded, buckskin costume, her face flushed by being the center of stranger glances.

However much she disliked the interview she could not but obey Warlula's instructions, and, as she alighted gracefully upon the sward, she repudiated the presence of all except him with whom she had been ordered to communicate.

She fixed her gaze on "Buckskin Sam," seeming to know him by intuition, and he sprung from his horse and removed his sombrero in respect for beauty, grace, and sex, as did every man in the command. All seemed amazed by the strange, unaccountable appearance of the Indian maid, though through Sam's mind ran thoughts with lightning speed, connecting her with Warlula. Before he could frame words to address her she spoke:

"Lulula would have talk with Buckskin, the white brother of Warlula. Her eyes and heart say he is before her."

"The eyes and heart of Lulula are truthful!" exclaimed Sam. "Warlula is my brother, and Lulula my sister. I am proud to meet one I have heard so often praised by as true a warrior as ever trod prairie-grass, and of whom I am anxious to hear. My ears are open to the words of Lulula."

"When the moon was big in the sky," explained the Indian maid, "Lulula came to the nest of her warrior—she found talking leaf—she found arrow—the talking leaf told her Warlula on war-trail—long trail—want Lulula bring horse—arrow say trail go over Bravo, pointing south—Lulula ride fast take mustang to Warlula—ride long over Nueces—meet Warlula—he say tell white brother come on trail—bring more white warriors, Greasers with White Lily go over Bravo—Laredo ford—maybeso Monterey—Warlula take horse, leave one much sick—go fast, go back on trail—say go Monterey if Greaser go—leave sign, maybeso lose scalp for white brother—then Lulula jump in big water—Lulula die."

Buckskin Sam grasped the hand of the Indian maid, pressed it to his heart, while a wild, jubilant yell arose from the Rangers, that rung through the bottom timber, causing the leaves and drooping moss to quiver like aspens, and the Indian maid to shrink back like a startled fawn, and spring up into the branches of the tree.

"Hold, Lulula!" shouted Sam. "The boys are yelling to show their appreciation of the gallant daring of Warlula and yourself."

The Indian girl gazed down a moment upon the boisterous crowd, and seeing in their eyes nothing but respect she waved a graceful adieu, and disappeared from whence she came, up the grape-vine, amid the mossy draperies, to the nest of Warlula.

The Rangers knowing that it would be useless holding any further conversation with her, as they were confident that she had told them all that she knew in regard to the trail, filled their canteens, rode up the stream to the ford and then struck out for the Laredo crossing of the Rio Grande.

"Gentlemen, we must use our nags with care," remarked Fighting Ben, as they fairly settled to their course. "We may need both speed and endurance when we point for Texas after showing our hand to these Greaser guerrillas. We'll have a thousand yellow-skinned cusses after us, in less time than it takes to spread a lay-out."

"That are solid hoss sense, Ben," exclaimed

Big Foot Wallace, as he shot a squirt of tobacco juice over his horse's head. "Yer talk are plain, ter ther p'int, an' chuck full o' re'sun. It 'pends, sum, how things pan-out, whether we make ther rifle an' korral ther gal without kickin' up a double distilled, old he rumpus. Ef we has ter use our shooters much, nigh on ter Monterrey, thar's a dead sure thing on our havin' ter bump oursel's right pert on ther jump, fur ther Bravo ag'in. Howsumever, I rec'ons on our keepin' ther yaller-bellies a 'spectful distance with our Sharps. I ha'n't fit ev'ry thing what wares ha'r, frum ther big—sal'-drink ter ther Rockies—reds, grizzlies, panthers, an' sich, ter pass my checks inter a Greazer. I'd just as soon speed 'er thru' ther hull Montezuman c'untry, as ter cross ther big plains ter Sante Fe. Are any ev yer feed sottin' bad on yer stumjack, Joe, that yer ain't a-slingin' yer tung' az fluently as common?"

"Ab, melord duke," answered Reckless Joe, "dost thou address me with the idea that I shall expiate upon each and every thought that has, for the last ten minutes, run riot within me alabaster brow? If so, I tell you at the start, 'tis impossible to narrate the wild workings of me brain. But first and foremost of me troubles is, the fact, that we shall soon be playing hide and seek in the cactus country, and most of you boys are fond of chili. You see that troubles me. I sha'n't have a fair show at grub time. *Chili colorado red pepper* is me abomination, and you'll have it in every dish you cook. Your *frijoles* will be so full of it that it will take the skin off a man's throat, the turkeys will be stuffed with it, while Joseph will be compelled to sit on one side with his corn-pone, *carnie asado*, and coffee without extras, all because you are copper lined and can swallow red pepper by the mouthful, without winking. Bah! the thought makes me thirsty now; how will I feel over the river, where water is scarce, the ground cracked with drouth, and the sun is blazing down?"

A hearty laugh all around greeted Joe at the close of his remarks.

"I really believe," said Daring Bill, "that if Joe was in the middle of a deal, was raking in doubloons by thousands, he'd stop to ask if the coffee had boiled, and if the beef didn't need turning. Joe, you think more of your stomach than any one I know of, and still you've had to suffer many a time for grub on the plains."

"You're right, me lord," answered Joe. "Sam and myself have had tough troubles on the North and West plains, particularly crossing the Llano Estacado. We have roughed it when we didn't mind how tough the grub was, if 'twas only eatable."

"I have seen the time when numberless civilized luxuries floated in ornerly array before me half-starved vision, but didn't do me any good. I say a baked coyote is a rich meal alongside of nothing. Then even a stewed lariat is tangible, is nourishing, is eatable. When a man's hungry he'll eat old boot or bridle soup; and a centenarian buck Piute would be a luxury, even without salt. Boys, when I get up from a good square meal, all is serene and beautiful. The befeathered flat—"

"Hold ther cuss, stop him," yelled Big Foot, amid boisterous laughter. "Cum out square-footed Bill Thompson, an' 'spain what kinder trail Joe's tung' are on now. He's ther orlest galoot I ever seed. What's he bin eatin'? He talks as tho' he'd swallowed a hull skule-house."

"I don't know what's up with Joe," answered Daring Bill. "He throws a full deck of words, that's a fact. Ask him yourself, what troubles him."

"Joe! O—h Joe! what have struck yer now? Watch him, boys, an' don't let him git a-goin' ag'in."

Joe reined up his horse, alongside of the Giant Scout, saying in answer, and without a trace of a smile upon his countenance:

"King of the live-oaks! I would have you know—now listen to me tale, and mark well me words. An eccentric fastidiousness has struck me, without embarrassment and without a reconnoissance as to the reception of me words, without a prepossessing introduction. I have made mystification, my best card. I have explained a somewhat chemical affair, with a felicity of quotation, an exuberance of spirit, and voluble lips. If I have been extremely enthusiastic in regard to a short acquaintance with a winged warbler, who is at times aquatic and luxuriates in extended ab-

Intions at others cuts the air as do the angels in astronomical explorations, my remarks have been incontrovertible, even if perspectively imaginary. If I have been vociferously garrulous, so much so that it affects your porosity, I throw me upon your mercy. I am circumstanced at the present moment affluently in the way of feed, am diminutive in stature and willing to conciliate toward the convalescence of your trouble, called exasperation, contracted by my copious illustrations in soaring adjectives. Nevertheless suggested symmetrical stat—”

But Joe was suddenly interrupted by Big Foot's manner and actions. The latter, exasperated beyond control, and having been perfectly stunned and bewildered with the jaw-breakers of Joe, jabbed spurs home, and with his hand on his six-shooter, charged at him, his patience utterly exhausted. Away went both, while the whole crowd roared with laughter.

“Lasso ther little cuss an' I'll s'uff his grub-trap full o' dirt!” yelled Big Foot. “Doggone yer, Joe, chaw up yer words afore yer spit 'em at me! Cotch him, boys, an' we'll gin him a puke ter git rid o' his high-falutin dickshunary English, or whatever danged lingo it are. We'll feed ther galoot on green persimmons arter this, an' that'll put his throt full o' kinke. It's scan'alus ter lessen, an' nobuddy kan buck ag'in' him.”

The Giant Scout shot out these words, half-angry, half-amused, while tightening his girth, the looseness of which had forced him to dismount.

“Boys!” exclaimed Fighting Ben as he sped over the prairie, Big Foot in pursuit, yelling like an Apache in a war-dance; “if it wasn't for the fun Joe makes, and once in a while a change from that to the bantering nonsense of Dutch Pete, and Mick, the trails would seem longer, our privations doubled, and we'd have a dull time generally, between fights, especially on a clear trail and easy riding speed.”

“You are right, Ben,” answered Sam. “Joe is the life of every crowd he's in; I never saw him wilt, I never knew him to loose his grip but once.”

“Deal us out the story, Sam,” requested “Daring Bill” “it will help pass the time; Big Foot has a long chase ahead.”

“Well, boys,” said Sam, “the time I refer to was when we were coming out to Texas together in 1859. We were on the fore-and-aft schooner Henry James, and had a fair wind and weather until we struck the Gulf of Mexico. I had purchased, at the recommendation of the captain, before sailing, some old Otard brandy, and pickled limes, as a preventive of seasickness. By partaking of homoeopathic doses of the brandy, and nibbling on the limes, Joe kept his stomach in order until we were south of Key West, when a most terrific gale struck us, tearing sails to ribbons, and breaking loose a quantity of barrels of beef and pork, which formed a part of our deck load. The wildest confusion prevailed, and we shipped seas over our decks at every plunge. The heavy barrels rolled from side to side, and stove the bulwarks; the sailors refusing to risk their lives in trying to lash them again. The sea ran mountaineous high, the cabins were flooded, and it seemed we were doomed, especially when it was found the schooner was leaking badly.

“Joe had kept free from seasickness so far, having surreptitiously confiscated my brandy and limes; but this storm dished him, and he was the sickest boy I ever saw. I managed after lashing the women in the cabin, so they could not drown, as they were helplessly sick, to make Joe fast to the main rigging, so he could neither move hand or foot; for he did not care whether he rolled overboard or not. It was a discouraging enough sight for a well boy, and not much chance ahead for us to roam the prairies which was our day and night dream. Some of the sailors were at the pumps, others throwing overboard the deck load, the schooner's rail was under water, the captain was yelling, the crew swearing and the devil was to pay generally. I never shall forget that night. We drove before that north-east gale, down toward the coast of Yucatan. Although I was not seasick, poor Joe wilced; there wasn't any more nerve in him than in the deck swab, and between his purging spasms, when I would ask him how he felt, he would mutter, ‘Oh-h-h-h, Sam, take me back—to the Bowery—durn Texas—durn you.

Oh-h-h-h! roll me overboard! Oh h-h-h—heavens!’

“I had to lash myself by Joe's side to keep from being washed over into the sea, and at times crawled into the cabin to see to the women, whose protector was sick as death, lashed to the hatch bolt. We outrode the storm, however, and made the fastest trip between New York and Matagorda Bay that had ever been made under sail. Ask Joe some time if he was ever seasick, and you'll get some rare English out of him in the descriptive line. But I see he's up a tree where Big Foot can't get at him, and is spouting Shakespeare at our boss trailer. Joe's a brick, each and every time.”

“Thanks, Sam, for the story. I have never been on salt water,” returned Daring Bill, “and don't want any in mine.”

During all of this talk, however, no time had been lost. When the Rangers had reached the spot where Joe was corralled, a few laughing words were sufficient to put the two friends again in amity, and with scarcely a halt the Rangers moved on.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OUTLAW FASTNESS.

A two story, rambling edifice, with walls of adobe, three feet thick, stands in the midst of a walled garden, somber, gloomy, overshadowed with trees from which hung snakelike bignonias, orchids and other trailing vines, whose main stems come winding, twisting up from the dense shrubbery below.

Around this house are the china-tree cypress and the towering, plumed head of the coco-palm, and beneath, the orange, lemon, lime, guavas, mangoes and many others not indigenous to the soil, all in a tangled, unpruned state, a vegetable mob, each member striving to reach some spot where the sunlight would kiss its foliage, but the cypress and palm selfishly appropriating the light and warmth of the god of day.

The narrow windows of the *casa* are guarded by bars of iron, making it appear more like a prison than the habitation of a ranchero.

Still it had been such; and he who now owns it claims that as his profession. It does not differ from most Mexican haciendas, except that the shrubbery and trees surrounding it have been left for years unpruned, to spread and twine their shoots into a tangled jungle, through which but few sunbeams ever find their way.

The hacienda is situated within an extensive garden, around which are high adobe walls that cut off all intrusion, for upon the top of this wall the outer edges on each side have been built higher than the middle, and the cavity filled with earth the whole length of the wall surrounding the gardens and hacienda. In this earth, long ago, prickly-pear was planted, which grew rank and thick, rendering it impassable without a systematic and lengthy assault, aided by ladders and tools.

The gardens now are rich in fruits and flowers, at some distance from the building, where there are no trees towering above them. Commodious stables and outbuildings are almost hidden within the luxuriant groves of orange, lemon, pomegranate and wide-spreading bananas.

A passer by would not dream that the abode of man stood within the thorn-guarded groves did he not accidentally stumble against the adobe walls of the garden, for the roots of those trees next the wall have thrown seed and root to the other side, where the infant shoots have almost attained the same altitude as their parent stems. Were it not for the dreary prison-look of the buildings this would certainly be a quiet paradise, in which one weary of the selfishness and corruption of the hollow world might with a solitary pleasure, dream life away in continually balmy air. Even the *patio*, (court-yard.) is now but a narrow walk, since creeping vine and spreading shrub have burst up through the pavement, throwing the soft stones aside to give them room to send up branch and foliage. A massive gate of iron, itself eaten with rust and shrouded in green, is the only break in the great wall.

By the side of this entrance stands the lodge of the *portero* (porter) and there he sits puffing vigorously at his shuck *cigarrito*.

A straw sombrero shades the full-bearded, repulsive, brutal features of the *portero*, and a shock of coarse, black hair rests upon his shoulders. His eyes wander nervously about, like those of a suddenly disturbed serpent. The high cheek-bones, wiry form and hue of

skin show him to be a mestizo, having a mixture of Spanish, Mexican and Indian blood in his veins.

A brace of large holster pistols which carry a blue-whistler, (ounce ball,) and a deadly *cuchillo*, (long bladed knife,) are stuck in the folds of his red silken sash, while on the grass at his feet lies an escopeta.

This hacienda, dear reader, was the birth-place of Jose Castro. In these gardens, in his boyhood days, he plucked the fruits and flowers, and scattered crumbs for sweet singing birds, while in the ancient old adobe porch sat Don Raphael Castro and Inez, his father and mother. Over the court-yard, in after years, clattered the hoofs of gallant steeds, ridden by himself and supposed friend Lorenzo Brogado, when starting on some pleasure expedition for the entertainment of the latter. But now what a change! His father and mother murdered by him he had cherished and favored as a friend; his young wife torn from his arms by the same friend; and by some strange fatality, his home is enjoyed and owned by this murderer, Lorenzo Brogado—next to Juan N. Cortina the most celebrated bandit of Northern Mexico.

Suddenly the *portero* grasps his escopeta and springs to his feet, bending toward the gate in an attitude of listening. As the tinkle of spur-bells, and dull tramp of horses on the thick sward, strikes his ears, he bounds to the wall, next the gate; cocks his gun, and runs the muzzle between the iron bars.

The sounds, which tell of an approaching cavalcade, come nearer and nearer. The horsemen are within twenty paces of the gate, still screened from view by the wall, and the *portero* seems to grow pale, but at last musters courage to shout:

“Quien vive?”

“Amigos! Caramba, Antonio, are you getting blind that you know not your *compañeros compadres*? Are you turning cowardly that you skulk around the wall? You're as rusty as your old gate, and must take to the chaparral again or you won't be worth a cigarito-stub. Open to the fair lily of Texas, who henceforth is to be queen of the old hacienda. Where is Don Brogado—at the rancho or on the plain?”

“Don Lorenzo is at the *casa*, Señor Corlies. The walls are thick and to be still is to be secure. We have need to be watchful for those *diablo* Texans are bold bravos. They have tramped *el camino* to Monterey once and may do it again; if they did they would not pass us by.”

Antonio laid down his gun, and with a ponderous key unlocked the gate, swinging it open.

As the gate struck an iron socket, set in a post in the earth for the purpose of preventing too wide an opening, the dull clang of a bell sounded within the gloomy mansion, and the bandits rode within the *patio*, with Lena Castro in their midst. As the cavalcade filed up the courtyard the huge gate clanged behind them, and at the same time the front door of the *casa* opened, and a man stepped out to ascertain the character of those who were of so much importance as to have gained entrance into his grounds.

Although he has greatly changed in years it is Lorenzo Brogado still. The cheeks once flushed with youth are now ghastly and furrowed by dissipation and perhaps by a guilty conscience.

The same treacherous, snaky eyes are now glittering with pleasure, at the sight before him. He rests the ever ready gun, which he has brought full-cocked to the door, against the wall of the porch, and steps down to welcome his cut-throat gang, and gloat over the misery of his captive.

“Bueno hombre Corlies, you have won the doubloons. But where is the cursed Gringo, Buckskin! Surely he is carrion, or you'll carry less gold in your *matetos* (saddle-bags). Where are the other men?”

“Don Brogado,” answered Corlies, “we are in luck to bring the girl. We earned our gold dearly. I crossed the Bravo with less than one fourth of the men that I started with. They are now rotting near San Antonio de Bexar. The Texans are *mucho diablo*. They shoot fast and aim well, but we were too much for them. The coyotes have gnawed the bones of him you hate so much. We left Buckskin—Don Samwell as they call him in San Antonio—with a hole in his head, near Mission Conception.”

Buckskin Sam.

"Bueno! Dismount, stable your mustangs, and all come inside. I have a merry crowd within, among which you'll find old friends. Lena Castro, welcome, thrice welcome to your birthplace! I have an agreeable surprise for you anon. I see the *jornada* has fatigued you, but never mind. A few days of quiet rest—it's very quiet here, by the way—and you'll be fresh as yonder blushing cactus flower."

The bandit chief stepped to the side of her animal, to assist Lena from her saddle with exaggerated politeness, born of deep potations. Lena shrank from his grasp with a loathing, sickening fear at her heart, as the bandits, who had torn her from her home, with coarse laughter rode around the *casa* to the stables.

Jerking her mustang, she whirled about; but seeing no avenue of escape, and knowing by the taunting look of the fiend near her that there was none, she sprung unaided to the ground, though she staggered back with the numbness of one long in the saddle, added to the privations of the trail. Recovering herself she assumed an erect, proud position, and with blazing eyes exclaimed:

"Why have your cowardly ruffians torn me from my poor old father's arms? Why am I brought to this spot, now dismal, though once the beautiful home of my ancestors? Fitly does the cypress wave over the blood-stained stones where murder and rapine took the place of peace and love. Who are you, and what am I to you? Have you any claim on me or mine?"

"Dios! but you, in your anger, are ravishingly beautiful; and compare well with your mother as I first knew her."

"Had I a weapon, I would lay you dead at my feet for daring to mention one so holy; daring to contaminate her memory by speaking of her with your vile lips!"

With folded arms, poised head and taunting manner Lena faced Don Brogado.

"You would have made a star actress," he answered, sneeringly. "Why I have had you brought here you will know soon enough. Rest satisfied with what you do know, for, by the powers of Hades, you would regret the sense of hearing, did I give an explanation."

Lifting a silver whistle which hung about his neck, he now blew a call which was immediately answered by the appearance of a maiden, who, although careworn, and showing the marks of much mental suffering, was still beautiful, though now her features were contorted with jealous rage.

"Were you listening, Panchito?" demanded Don Brogado, "that you are here so soon? Beware! no dogging of my movements, no spying. Take this visitor to the upper, east chamber, give her suitable clothing and food."

Then in a lower tone he added:

"Remember that your tongue must not wabble, and for fear of intrusion you lock her door and bring the key to me. Do you understand?"

"Si, señor."

"See that you obey my instructions to the letter. If you do not you know what to expect."

The two women—one biting her lips with pent-up passion, the other utterly hopeless, helpless in the power of a human devil unscrupulous, merciless, almost dead from forced marches, want of sleep and food—disappeared within the portals of the gloomy, prison-like hacienda, followed by the bandits. Last of all entered Don Brogado, the chief cut-throat of them all; who double barred the strong door, with a rude chuckle of pleasure, flenish in expression.

Seated on the sward, in his old position, is the *portero*, Antonio, puffing at his cigarrito, apparently the only live man within those grim, gray garden walls.

When Lorenzo Brogado had securely fastened the outer door he followed the recently arrived men into the large dining hall, where a score of as desperate ladrones and assassins as themselves were congregated, engaged in a debauch, whose wild, boisterous revelry would have been heard outside were it not that the windows in this room had been sealed up with masonry, to the full thickness of the walls.

A loud yell of welcome greeted the new comers, and shouts of "Viva Corlies! Viva Don Brogado! Carreras Americanas!" resounded through the room, amid the clink, clink of glasses, and crash of empty bottles against the walls.

Don Brogado was elated by the success of his tools in penetrating to the principal city of

Western Texas and as it were bearding the lion in his den, capturing the only child of him who had been his successful rival in love, and giving the death shot to one he hated and detested for being the slayer of many of his men and the frustrator of many of his murderous plans.

The bandit chief manifested his pleasure by ordering his peons to bring fresh supplies of liquors. Then, at the head of the long table, which stood in the center of the room, he pledged his band in a toast.

"Fill to the brim, my brave *soldados!* (soldiers.) We rule the plain and chaparral, and now have a queen to rule the old hacienda! She is a beauty, worthy of your chief. Besides, I have combined business with pleasure. Revenge is my business; one more life, and the vendetta between the Brogados and Castros ends. The father will come for his child, and within these walls, if he can effect an entrance, where he first saw light, my *cochillo* shall drink his life-blood, though not until I show him his daughter the willing slave of his destroyer; and his wife a gibbering maniac!

"Drink, *mi hombres*, to the White Lily of San Antonio; the last scion of the Castilian Castros; the queen of our fortress; now the slave wife of your chief."

Loud rung the *viras* through the hall; from ruffians already crazed with drink, and glasses crashed into fragments as they were brought down on the table empty.

The debauch was kept up until, one by one, the brutes in the shape of men slid from their seats to the floor, and dropped into drunken slumbers, with muttered curses and babbling nonsense issuing from their poison-reeking lips.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGELY FOUND FRIEND.

WHEN Panchito conducted Lena Castro to the apartment designated by the chief, she left the captive while she went for a change of clothing, and for food for the a most famished girl.

No sooner did the door close, and Lena find herself alone for the first time in many days, than she fell upon her knees, and prayed long and fervently to the Blessed Virgin to watch over and temper the grief of her dear old father, and open some avenue for her escape and return to his arms.

Upon rising to her feet she glanced about her prison.

The room was furnished in elegance; but what interested her most was the casements. There were three windows, two looking east and one north; unglazed, and guarded by bars of iron, set into the walls.

Lena sprung from one to the other, grasping each bar of iron and striving with her feeble strength to loosen it or show signs that it could be removed.

But they were firmly imbedded, and she could not stir them. One thing she noticed, which pleased her. The branches of the trees brushing against the walls outside threw their green twigs and foliage between the bars of iron, so that they projected into the room. Reaching up she plucked a branch to hold to her parched, feverish lips and brow, when, to her horror, she found it was a twig of ill-omened cypress. At that her little remaining hope fled away. To be sure, judging from what she knew of the character of Buckskin Sam she had no doubt that if he lived he would leave no stone unturned in his endeavors to save her from the fearful fate she did not dare to allow her thoughts to dwell upon lest reason should desert her altogether.

Was he alive?

The last view she had of him he lay motionless and covered with gore, among the dead bandits.

Augustin Silicio, although her devoted lover and slave, was not sufficiently versed in prairie lore to follow the long trail she had come, even should his gold bribe Texas Mexicans to assist him. She knew even they would hesitate to risk the danger when they knew they would receive no quarter from the followers of Don Brogado, when once they met in battle. Was it not an impossibility for any one to penetrate to this mysterious retreat, once her babyhood home, the scene of the murder of her grand-parents, and the abduction of her mother?

Though her family history had been looked in the breast of her father, yet through his mutterings in troubled slumbers, and the un-

guarded conversation of the bandits on the march, she had learned enough to know that she was in the power of a brutal fiend, who had brought death, despair, perhaps dishonor, upon her dearest relatives, and caused her father's form to bend prematurely and turned his hair to silver with anguish and torturing agony.

Where was that dear mother whom she never remembered to have seen? Was she still alive? Great God! It was impossible for her to live and retain reason!

Pacing back and forth across the room with clenched hands, disordered tresses and tears running down her cheeks, Lena stopped in the middle of the apartment, while a shudder convulsed her frame as the massive door swung on its hinges. Thank God!—it was Panchito—not he.

At the sight of Lena in anguish and tears, Panchito slammed the door, threw the clothing upon a chair and caught both hands of her she had been commanded to serve.

Gazing into her eyes with a glance piercing, wild and filled with passion, she demanded:

"Does my lady love Don Brogado? will she be his wife?"

"May the Holy Virgin save me from such fate!" burst vehemently from the lips of Lena—at once an answer and a prayer.

"I hate, ay, loathe him, more than the poison-fanged serpents that hide in the orange twigs and spring without warning to bring a horrible death to those who never harmed them. Sooner than be his wife, I would trust my eternal happiness to the mercy of our holy mother and take my own life!"

A gratified expression played upon the features of the Mexican girl as she quickly drew from her breast a small, keen, glittering stiletto, saying:

"My lady will not take her own life and be eternally lost; but when Don Brogado seeks to do her harm cut his foul heart in twain. He won my love under another name; he induced me to leave my dear father and mother in Mier—I loving him better than life, than honor. He promised to marry me, but his tongue speaks naught but lies. I had a little babe—his babe and mine—and let me whisper the dread crime within your ear—he strangled the innocent nursling that, in the few days God loaned it to me, I had learned to love more than its father. I was too weak to save its life, but swore by the Virgin and saints over the cold form of my little Bonita that I would have vengeance; and I will, if God give me the chance."

"He thinks I love—I only fear him still. I wait for my time. It will come, and revenge—revenge sweeter than the thoughts of Heaven that spring from innocent minds—shall be mine!"

"Thanks be to Heaven that I have found a friend in this band of brutes!" exclaimed Lena, as she clasped Panchito in her arms.

For a moment the two were silent, for they realized the necessity of caution, and knew that it would even be better for them to appear enemies to each other, should they be brought together in the presence of Don Brogado.

Lena, after changing her draggled clothing, torn to ribbons by her wild ride through the chaparral, and partaking of a hearty supper, spent some time talking with Panchito in regard to the way in which things were conducted at the hacienda, and the means of egress.

Both came to the conclusion that it would be a matter of impossibility to escape without outside aid. Antonio, the *portero*, was an old member of the gang, and one who could not be influenced or bribed.

To this most important post the bandit chief had appointed one that he knew was faithful to the death to his interests, and one too well known by his crimes to care to venture even as far as the trail to Monterey, which passed but a mile from the hacienda walls.

This whole distance was a dense mesquite and cactus chaparral, in which no one would be liable to trust themselves, even did they stumble on one of the many narrow, winding trails made use of by the guerrillas.

Assuring Lena that she would not be disturbed that night, as the bandit band, with their chief, were too intoxicated to pay her a visit, Panchito folded her unfortunate sister in distress in her arms, kissed her good-night, and opened the door.

At this instant a prolonged, piercing shriek rung through the house, seeming to come from a closed apartment in a distant part of the casa.

Seeing a shudder of alarm shake the form of Lena, Panchito exclaimed:

"There is no harm being done. I will tell you about this to morrow. Now go to sleep, for I must leave you. We may be suspected if I do not give up the key. I shall watch over you, my sister."

"*Bueno noche!*"

The door closed, the key grated, the bolts shot with a rasping, grinding sound, that sent a shiver of dreariness through the poor captive, and Lena was alone.

Realizing that she must seek repose, and having faith in Panchito, that she would explain the horrible scream which, from the Mexican girl's manner, she believed ought not to cause her alarm, she eventually, from the utter exhaustion of many nights full of anguish and concern, fell into a deathlike slumber. Then the sweet notes of a cenzontle, the mockingbird of Mexico, filled the room, as, perched upon a branch at her window, the feathered warbler seemed to be calling down blessings on the head of the captive Castilian maid, who, in her dreams, once more hung her arms around the neck of her dearly beloved and much-suffering father.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE AT THE LAREDO FORD.

ON the American side of the Rio Grande ride, late at night, a score or more of horsemen, their mustangs half-sliding, half-stumbling down the steep bank at the Laredo ford.

Although not a word is spoken, and no noise is made, except the unavoidable jingle of bit, spur and accouterments, it is not hard to recognize the Texan Rangers, with Sam, Joe, Ben, Bill, and Big Foot in the lead.

The waters of the river glide on in inky blackness before them, but there is no hesitation as they come to their edge. Each man hangs his ammunition and revolvers about his neck, shoulders his rifle, and giving a loose rein to his steed, plunges in, each leaving a long, dark, boiling eddy behind.

They soon disappear in the darkness; but by intently listening, the grinding of hoofs, the rattle of gravel, and dripping of waters, can be heard, as the mustangs scramble out and up the opposite bank.

The Rangers are upon the dangerous border—the dark and bloody ground of Mexico. Upon the south side of the Rio Grande a white man's life is not worth a real. Before them lies one wide expanse of foes; what may be behind them they have never thought, and so, certainly, could not guess.

Yet there are some in their rear who are either friends or foes; for on that border there are no neutrals.

Scarcely has the sound of the tramping of the Ranger's steeds died away in the distance when a single horseman comes down the bank, following over the very ground trodden by those who have gone on.

The moon, just peeping over the prairies, gives light enough to recognize the solitary rider. It is Black Bravo—he who dogged Buckskin Sam's footsteps the night when he sought the presence of Lena Castro's father.

He is armed to the teeth; his features, his form, and manner in the saddle show a delicacy almost feminine.

But there is nothing delicate nor feminine about the way he urges his mustang, maddened by the torturing spurs, into the river, with a spattering plunge.

He is following the trail of those in his front with intense eagerness; but even that interest does not entirely account for his haste. There is still another on the trail, the sound of whose approaching gallop can be distinctly heard before Black Bravo has mounted the bank and plunged into the bushes upon the other side of the Laredo ford.

A few moments after Black Bravo has passed from sight an Indian in war-paint, and armed with rifle, revolver and a bow and quiver at his back comes down to the water's brink, and halts for a moment.

A seeming Indian warrior; and yet the graceful movement of the body, acting in concert with each step of the animal, the graceful poise of the Indian's head, and lastly the intricate and elaborate ornamentation of the quiver show that it is Lulula, the beautiful Tonkaway, who has taken the trail of him she loves.

A moment she listens to the vanishing sounds of the now distant gallop of Black Bravo's mustang, then Lulula urges on her horse, it breasts the waters of the rolling river, and is soon speeding on the trail of those who have gone before.

And not a moment too soon has she gone, if she would escape observation, for once more there is a clatter of hoofs, this time of a hundred, and down the bank, in a disorderly throng, go a score of Texan Mexicans, with Don Jose Castro at their head. By his side rides a young Castilian gentleman, clad in a richly ornamented costume, and armed with weapons tipped and embellished with silver and gold.

Though years and misery had racked and broken his frame Don Jose had been unable to rest supinely under the burden of grief cast upon him by the abduction of his daughter. A day or two of inaction had rendered him almost insane. Visions of a thousand nameless horrors were conjured up in his brain, through all of which he saw his beloved daughter passing, until he could rest quiet no longer and live. It was then, that he and Augustin Siliceo, having had a long conference, decided to hire this party of San Antonio Mexicans to go with them to aid the Rangers in regaining Lena, and punishing his hated enemy Don Brogado.

Thus many armed, determined avengers are speeding toward the old hacienda, and the prospects are that the bandit gang of Don Brogado will soon have a lively time of it amid the dense thickets of thorns which mask their stronghold.

The Rangers could have gone down the American side of the river, as far as Guererro, or even to Roma, and not added any miles to their trail, supposing the bandits had taken Lena into the vicinity of Monterey; but it was possible that the rendezvous of the guerrillas might be on the Rio Sabinas—indeed, it was quite likely. So far they had had clear work, as the Tonkaway had left plain sign, and in addition the robbers had, for security, left the regular, traveled road, and taken to the chaparral stock paths where there was but small chance of meeting either wagon trains or soldiers of the republic.

But the calculations and reasonings of the Rangers, although not correct in regard to finding the retreat of Don Brogado upon the stream ahead, were so in regard to meeting difficulties at so favorable and favorite a camping place for the bandits of Juan N. Cortina. Just before reaching Rio Sabinas "Fighting Ben" and his brother, "Daring Bill," had ridden on ahead of the command to reconnoiter and ascertain the best place for a halting camp, as the horses needed rest and feed. The boys had but time to reach the timber, which towered above the surrounding chaparrals, and bordered the river upon each side, when the main command was suddenly surprised by a fusillade of revolver shots and fierce yells.

In an instant, all, except the guard in charge of the pack-mules, drove spurs deep, and bounded along through the many cattle trails which led to the river.

The Rangers were not a moment too soon, for Ben and Bill were desperately holding their ground against a horde of Greasers, whose loud yells of "*Viva Cortina!*" proclaimed their character.

Little did the guerrillas think that upon their native soil they would meet such a charge as now cut through and through their ranks.

Amid Texan yells, dying groans, and rallying cries, a leaden hail of bullets mowed them down; rifle barrels went crashing through skulls, and Bowie-knives, held and guided by sinews of steel, ripped the bandits from breast to thigh. It was for a few brief moments a horrible *mélée*, shrouded in thick sulphurous smoke, the air filled with the sickening taint of blood and powder. During this time, when friend and foe were indiscriminately mixed, Sam, whose horse in the charge had carried him in affrighted plunges clear of the scene of conflict, into the bandit camp, found himself nearly surrounded by a gang of Greaser cut-throats, who assailed him from the only point which parted him from his ranger pards.

Defending himself with desperation, almost hopeless at the extreme danger of his position, he blazed the remaining shots in his revolvers into the mass coming upon him in an annihilating charge, threw his empty weapons at the heads of the nearest of those who survived his fusillade, and grasping his rifle by the barrel

raised it high in air and drove spurs deep into the flanks of Black Cloud, in hopes of riding down or through those in his front.

Black Cloud behaved nobly. The rifle swung quickly, and with good effect but the bandits were too many for one man to cope with. A lasso, from the outside of the now inclosing circle of foes, hissed through the air, the noose encircling his neck and tightening as a prayer fell from his lips. As the torturing raw-hide was choking out his breath the deadly *cuchillo's* (long-bladed knives) flashed upon all sides.

But death was not yet to be his portion, for the war cry of a Tonkaway broke upon the air, in brave though somewhat feeble tone. Help was coming. More than one Greaser threw up his arms, dropping the glittering knife he had thought to bury in the scout's body, while his eyes rolled in death as he sunk back from the mustang which, with mad plunges, stampeded away. A Tonkaway to the rescue!

Still, however, the tightly-drawn noose of the lasso encircled the neck of Buckskin Sam, and it seemed that life for him was very near its close, since a blackness of night was drawn across his eyes, and he felt as though just launching into a great whirlpool.

Then suddenly a slender youth in richly ornamented black velvet dashed past our hero, placed his revolver against the twanging lasso and with one shot severed it in twain, while with another he laid low the Mexican who held the further end. At the same time an Indian in full war-paint plunged past, dealing death right and left, while Sam, utterly bewildered, wounded and bruised, almost choked, swaying and tottering, clung to the mane of the mustang, who cleared the mass of dead and dying bandits with wild bounds and stood panting at the south side of the guerrilla camp. Recovering himself, Sam turned his animal to get a view of the field and his preservers.

The fight was over. A number of riderless horses were stampeding here and there, insane from the fight of battle and torturing wounds: their hoofs crashing through the skulls and mangling the bodies of those who proudly rode them as masters but a short time before.

Just emerging from the mesquites were the Rangers coming in scattering groups, but no sign could Sam see of the mysterious pair of friends, who had arrived upon the field so opportunely, and who had, without a doubt, saved his life. During the excitement, the danger and the smoke of battle, neither the stranger in velvet nor the Indian had been recognized, nor had our hero any idea of their identity, as he had not seen their faces.

"How in ther name o' Krocket, come yer out here, little pard?" yelled Big Foot, as he rode up to our hero and gazed with surprise at the dead bandits some distance away from the scene of the main fight.

"Are ye hurt? Gerusilem an' jumpin' ge-hossifat! ye had a rouser ev a fight! That thar beats all ther shootin'— I say, 'Buck,' how did yer git away with all them skum o' ther Bravo? Thar's enuff on 'em ter h'ist a half-dozen like yer outer than boots an' make 'em wilt inter than socks—perviden' tha' is high born an' tender-footed enuff ter w'ar wool."

"Quite a number of them quit the business, I admit, Wallace," answered Sam, as he reloaded his revolvers, which he had regained from among the dead bandits where he had thrown them during the fierce conflict. "They came near sending me over the river—as near as I ever care to go again—but I had help, very strange help. Did any of you hear the war-cry of a Tonkaway down here, not long since?"

"No!"

"Nary a war-cry?"

"Not a wonst!"

"Well, boys, it was a very lucky thing for me," explained Sam. "I was lassoed and choked half to death after I got away with a few of them; and the long knives were coming, just a-flashing into my eyes, when I heard a war-yell, a fusillade of revolver shots following, and a gay-looking duck, dressed in black velvet, mounted in style, shot away the lasso and went through the Greasers on a Charley May charge. At the same time a young Indian—I didn't get a glimpse of the faces of either—took in upon those that black velvet missed like chain lightning. Between the two they made a ten strike, and vanished before I knew which end my head was on, or could express my

Buckskin Sam.

thanks for their services. Take it all around, it's a harder puzzle to me than locating 'Thimble Rig Jim's' little joker."

"Thar a'n't no use ter stir up yer brain on ther subjec'," said Big Foot, decidedly. "If thar's any loose friends 'round, what think enuff on yer ter do sich a job as that thar, why yer lucky. Fact are, it's a dead sure thing, no matter what sort ev a scrape yer git yersel' inter. yer cum out squar' an' flat-footed, without brakin' bones or losin' ha'r. Yer g'ardi'n angil minds her biz, an' are alwis 'round. Keep yer eye skinned in ther futur' fur black velvety, an' when yer hears a Tonk's war-yell ag'in, cut-side o' Warlu'a's, why, I rec'on yer'll hav' a show ter thank ther cuss what done a big thing fur yer. 'Twa'n't our red, I'll sw'ar; fur he are a score o' leagues trum this, a-usin' his eyes an' ears ter 'vantage, bet yer last hog! Boys, bump yersel's, an' git ready ter git frum here! Sam, yer don't low ter camp afore night, I rec'on, arter this scrape? Yer don't chuze ter camp amung sich a lay-out ev excoriated, scarified, homicidal, corpses? Thar's another squad o' Cortina's ladrones bu'sted up, an'll soon be re'dy to be served up as a second-class free lunch fur cayootes and buzzards. What are yer a-sayin', little pard?"

"I wasn't saying anything, Wallace. You have had the floor," answered Sam. "But I've been thinking that, as you say, we had better put the leagues between us and this camp. The cut-throats who have escaped may work us mischief, for I have no doubt but that they are connected with Don Brogado's band, and they may warn that gentlemanly butcher of this invasion. If so, he will consider that our advance upon Mexican soil means business with him, and take steps to balk us by flying to his mountain retreat, where it will be almost impossible for us to accomplish our purpose, and we will run the risk of losing the lives of the whole party. I have hopes of seeing the Tonkaway soon. Then we will know just what to expect ahead. We must now look to the wounded—I hope none are hurt so they can't continue the march."

"Tom Johnson and Steve Spaulding are both dead," announced Fighting Ben, as he rode up at this moment.

"Yes," added Big Foot. "I see'd 'em go under; but tha' fit like white men an' culdn't 'a' gone on ther dark trail in a better cause—though I hates ter lose a pard by a Greaser knife."

"A dreadful misfortune," exclaimed Sam. "We could not spare such heroic fellows and it hurts my heart that time will not allow us to take their bodies to a last home on Texas soil."

"Glory be to God!" here burst out Mick. "The dacindint ev the last king o' Ballyschlaven kan sthand 'pon his own two futs, an' behould himself alive an' kicking. Sure Mick's a sinsible sleeveen, an' dun a power o' slatherin' an' whackin' wid them yallar-bellies, or begorra I'd be kilt int r-ly, an' cut off frum avin' purgatory, be bain' laid wid these murtherin' divils wid them other b'y's. Sure, if ye care fur Mick, b'y's, whin he's kilt ye'll take him in a bag over the big river yondther, an' hav' a praste say a prayer fur a dacindent ev ther last king o' Ballyschlaven."

"Vell, you 'ad better tooks sum breacher along mit you, Mick, und sdakes 'im ower do grass mit a bicket bip, ginder loose, mit der odder mulars, so day kan kick his prains ower. Dare vas do many dem breachers apout already."

"Tundther an' turf, but it's yerself 'll be wanting a pr'acher before long, I'm thinkin', Misther Pate. Sure tha'r a hape smarther'n yerselt; faix I niver saw wun—"

"S'posin' yer sh'u'd shet up yer grub-traps," broke in Big Foot, riding past the pair, "an' low yer hashed up lingo ter subsude. I rec'on yer'd be solider, bein's we'un's are 'bout ter kiver up a c'upple o' pards, what never 'll hav' another show at shootin', cutthin' or chawin.' Peas ter me yer'd better be sorter more bu-man, if yer'd hav' less gab, an' hustle round an' fix things up, so we 'uns kan git frum this ockerd persish'."

Amid words of deep sorrow and regret, and praises of their bravery and fidelity, the dead were buried, the wounded attended to, and all gathered together, ready for another fight, should foes stand in the trail between them and the object that had brought them outside of the boundaries of the Lone Star State.

"On, boys, on!" yelled Sam, as he galloped to the front, in the company of Ben and Bill.

"On to the gold-chests of Don Lorenzo Brogado!"

"On to Monterey!"

"On to the rescue of the old man's darling, from the brutal murderers of the chaparrals!"

"On, on, me braves!" broke out "Reckless Joe." "On for glory, and gold! Sam can take the old man's darling; we'll take the yellow doubloons! By all the gods of war but I'm hungry! I'm starving! Give me a square meal, or give me death! Feed me extensively and I'll hurl defiance at the whole Greaser Republic, from the middle of the Grand Plaza of Monterey!"

"When there's a show for grub, boys, some of you whisper in my ear to that effect, for I'm a-going to estimate in my mind how many coffee and cake shops there are between the Battery and Union Square, and the length of time it would take me if I was dropped flat-footed at Castle Garden to go through them all."

The depression of spirits which had fallen upon the band of Rangers from the death of their pards was thrown off by forced hilarity. They knew the necessity of keeping up their spirits and hopes in the dangerous position they were in, on foreign soil. Even the wounded exhibited a fortitude that, under the circumstances, was heroic in the extreme, and called forth the admiration of their more fortunate comrades.

All were aware that it was a necessity to be brave and true to each other, that every man must act as a watchful guard for the whole, that it was impossible for the wounded to return to Texas since the absence of the guard who would be forced to attend them would so weaken the party that the expedition would have to be abandoned, or the lives of those who remained would be at the mercy of the blood-thirsty bandits of either Cortina, or Don Brogado, his right bower.

So, for the present, we will leave them, pressing on through the cacti country, the thorns, the leaves of the bristling Spanish daggers and bayonets, the sword palma and even the humble soap-weed all seeming, with their sharp, steel-like pointed foliage, to be threatening them, or warning them, to return, and the ill-omened, red-jowled buzzard hovering over their heads as if the foul vultures expected, before long, to prowl about and over their dead carcasses, and pluck out their eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MIDNIGHT SHRIEK.

The morning following the drunken debauch of the bandits at the hacienda, Lena Castro was awakened by the sweet songs of many birds that, flitting through the foliage near her window, uttered a thousand musical notes of joy, as the god of day arose over the far-off plains, and cast his warm smiles across the dew-dripping leaves of the tree-tops. At first Lena did not realize where she was, so deep and unbroken had been the sleep, that followed her privations and great fatigue. Almost the first thought, after comprehending her situation, was of her newly-found friend, Panchito, whose reappearance she waited for with a great yearning.

She had not long to wait, for Panchito soon appeared, with a breakfast of coffee, tortillas, and chili-concarne, which she had prepared with her own hands, and with a "good-morning," both smiled and spoken, she placed the smoking meal before the captive maid, who greeted her in a loving manner and partook freely of the food set before her, Panchito waiting upon her in silence.

Lena noticed that the breakfast service was of solid silver, beautifully engraved, with the monogram of an old Castilian family deeply cut in each piece. This was another convincing proof of the strength and utter recklessness of the bandits. She reasoned that were they not in some way protected or favored by the government they would not dare to maintain a rendezvous so near to Monterey nor allow such proofs of their criminal trade to be used in the hacienda. It certainly showed plainly that Lorenzo Brogado felt secure in the retreat he had chosen for his head-quarters.

When Lena had satisfied her appetite, she thanked the Mexican girl, and then proceeded to question her, hoping to be able to concoct some plan of escape through the knowledge Panchito had gained by a long stay in the casa.

But first she decided to ascertain the mean-

ing of the mysterious cry which had so alarmed and puzzled her the previous night.

"Now please explain, Panchito," asked Lena, "in regard to the scream I heard last night. I fear some other poor unfortunate woman is detained here by these brutes, and has been fearfully wronged. There was something in her cry which wrung my heart, alas! already overflowing with grief at being torn from the arms of my poor father. I know the necessity for keeping my spirits and hopes up since I want not only to preserve life and honor, but, if possible to escape with you, Panchito, from this dreadful place, once the happy home of my parents."

"Dear lady, I can tell you but little in regard to the strange captive kept confined here by *el diablo* Brogado. She has been here ever since I was brought to this den of sin. From one of the gang who was wounded and brought here to be nursed by me, and who afterward died, I learned that she was of noble birth and was once loved by Don Brogado. She rejected him to marry another; and amid fearful slaughter he tore her from her home and husband, many years ago, and kept her hidden in his mountain cave, far from here. I also learned that a holy Padre, who held high influence over Don Brogado, and who had once been the confessor of this lady, had used his influence to gain her release and return to her husband, but had only succeeded, by holding his curse over the head of Don Brogado, in preserving her from violence and outrage. But the wretched lady became insane, and whenever the bandit chief presented himself before her, to gloat over the success of his heathenish revenge upon his rival, she would shriek wildly, and go into convulsions. He seeks her presence but seldom, yet I knew last night that he was on a visit to her and that made me hasten away for fear that he would observe I had been in your company too long. The reason I am here so early this morning is that I may have a few minutes' conversation before he sleeps off the effects of the *eguardiente* and vino which he drank so freely last night."

During the time Panchito had been relating her story Lena, her forehead clasped by both palms, had listened intently, and thought deeply. For some time after the Mexican girl had ceased speaking she remained thus; then she looked up, and speaking suddenly, inquired:

"Panchito, how came you so much above most Mexican girls in education?"

"Padre Benivedas, of Mier, taught me, my lady."

"You were very unfortunate ever to have allowed yourself to be taken from his holy influence. Now I will ask if you have not—with what you have heard fall from my lips and what you must have overheard between myself and Lorenzo Brogado—in your thoughts connected this unfortunate, insane captive, with myself?"

"Oh, God! can it be?" continued Lena, as she sprung to her feet, and paced the floor with impatient strides. "Can it be that the surprise this fiend promised me was to present me to the insane wreck of—my mother?"

The last two words were given out in a hoarse, gasping whisper. Pale as death she stopped in her walk opposite Panchito, who had also sprung to her feet as ghastly as her who stood so deathlike and silent, with clasped hands, before her.

Lena, horror-stricken that a fiend could exist, who would find joy in such a scene, and wild with the horrible realization of those pent-up longings to see her mother that she had nursed within her heart through life, clasped the hands of Panchito, and with the tears coursing down her cheeks exclaimed:

"Panchito, what think you? Is it possible, or am I too going insane?"

"Not only possible, dear lady, but, as there is a God above us, 'tis true. In the very poise of form, in every gesture, glance of eye, movement, and tone of voice, I see the counterpart of the poor lady confined below. Strange that with what has been said, and your presence here, together with the knowledge of the great cost of life and gold to get you, I had not thought that revenge was at the bottom of it all! Did I not hear you called a Castro fool? That I was to know that a Brogado only seeks a Castro for revenge? That I have heard a thousand drunken curses called down upon the family, and have known your father's death and your ruin would only end the terrible ven-

datta! How did Don Castro escape these devils sent to kill him? Holy Mary protect you! A fearful fate is in store for the daughter of Don Jose Castro.

"But Panchito will save you or die! Her stiletto will find the black heart which lured her from home and virtue."

Holding the glittering steel above her head she whispered an oath, kissed the blade, and stood before Lena a perfect picture of faithful friendship and heroism.

One instant these two, so strangely met, so suddenly become sisters in affection and danger, gazed lovingly into each other's eyes, and then they were folded in each other's arms, the lily-white cheek of the Castilian nestling against the creamy skin of the daughter of the Montezumas; the red lips, through which coursed the proud blood of old Spain, pressing those rich in the fire and fortitude of Indian kings.

The heavy, iron-studded door burst suddenly open, and the bandit chief, with tangled hair, disordered clothing and bloodshot eyes blazing with fury, stood before them.

"Santissima Maria!" broke in a hoarse whisper from Panchito.

Then she hastily whispered to Lena to counterfeit sickness and leave the brute to her.

"Caramba! what means this billing and cooing of female doves? Panchito, what do you here? Your short acquaintance calls not for such extravagant affection. What means this, I demand? Are you a traitor to your chief? Explain, or I'll cut your heart out and throw your carcass over the wall for coyotes to feast on!"

Although the situation called for great self-command and tact, Lena comprehended her position, and that of her friend, immediately.

Knowing all depended upon her actions, she languidly drooped again back upon the shoulders of Panchito, who answered with an unwavering voice the demand of the bandit chief.

"This lady is very ill, Don Brogado. Her *jornada* has been too much for her. She could not eat, so I have taken my breakfast here, as she has been in such a condition that I feared to leave her alone. I think she had better retire again, if you will be so kind as to leave us. She may require a doctor from Monterey if she does not improve through the day."

The bandit chief leaned against the door and leered with suspicion at the two females, as Panchito, to carry out the plot, assisted Lena to a chair, and bathed her head with perfumed spirits.

Lena was so filled with fear at the sight of the monster she hated with such intensity, that she became more and more ghastly, until even Don Brogado, still partially stupefied with drink, was convinced that she was dangerously ill. Not wishing to have a doctor or priest enter his haunt, he staggered out, thinking his presence calculated to increase Lena's sickness, and closed the door, rejoining his followers, who were tremblingly quaffing their morning drams.

No sooner had the door closed than Lena sprung to her feet, exclaiming:

"Panchito, this warns us that we must be more prudent! Why did you not lock the door? Thank God! the monster has gone! I thought I should die with horror. Do not leave me in his power. I felt a deathly terror come over me at the sight of his bloated face. I should not have the strength to brave or defy him, or even attempt to protect myself in his presence. I fear I should lose my senses did he enter this room when I was alone. By all the hopes you have of heaven, I adjure you, do not leave me, my dear, my only friend, and for the love of mercy, think of some plan to bring me face to face with her I believe is my mother. Great God, give me strength a little longer!"

Panchito pressed a glass of vino dulce to the lips of Lena, who drank the invigorating cordial and became more calm.

Meanwhile thoughts and plans for the welfare of her friend ran like wild-fire through the brain of the faithful Mexican girl.

"When my lady feels better, Panchito will take her to the room of the mad-woman, even at the risk of her life. Thank the saints, Don Brogado drank deep last night, and in consequence must also drink more this morning, or suffer greatly. I know a way to the room of her I am positive is your mother, which he little dreams I am aware of. Come, we must go now, while he is with his Russian crew."

Taking the hand of Lena the Mexican girl

led the former out, locking the door and securing the key at her girdle.

With stealthy steps various passages were traversed and they descended two flights of stairs, the last, damp, moldy and covered with spider-webs. They were in the cellars of the hacienda.

It was not very dark, as a narrow, grated window allowed a dim light to show the casks and bottles, of which the bandit chief had a goodly store.

Traversing the cellar to the further and north side, Panchito climbed up upon some casks and reaching above her head she pushed up upon a ring, opening a trap door to the ground floor of the *casa* above. Then assisting Lena upon the casks she, with the help of the latter, succeeded in making her way through the trap.

A low murmur of incoherent sounds broke upon the ear of Lena as she stood in the semi-darkness upon the wine casks; then the hands of her friend reached down through the trap. Grasping them and giving a spring she landed in the room above.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIEND AT THE GRATING.

WHEN Lena Castro stood by the side of Panchito, after springing through the trap door from the wine-cellar, a sight met her eye which made her grasp the arm of her friend for support, while a wild cry leaped from her half parted lips, in which cry was blended joy, sorrow, and the long pent up love of years.

Seated in a huge old arm-chair, swiftly slipping some gold beads back and forth on a string, dressed in gay colors of rich goods, but of old-fashioned make, was the form of her she had so often dreamed of, so often prayed for, so often longed yet dreaded to see.

The oil painting of her mother, which hung at her home in San Antonio, draped in black crape, had been, from infancy, familiar to Lena Castro's eyes, and the face before her was its counterpart, except that lines of care and suffering were on the brow, the cheeks were ghastly, and the look in the eyes had changed from the loving tenderness depicted in the picture to a vacant, meaningless stare, or a glance of dread, or one of fierce defiance and hatred.

One appealing loving look Lena cast upon the form of her she now knew was her long-lost mother; then she sprung from the trap-door and kneeling, clasped the hands of the insane woman, and covered them with kisses.

To the astonishment of Panchito, who had quickly followed to protect her friend from any outbreak of the mad-woman, the latter, in place of exhibiting anger or violence, softly stroked the hair of her daughter, and bending down lovingly, kissed her pure, white brow.

Lena, with tears of joy, flung her arms about her mother's neck, and for the first time within remembrance, kissed her lips, and murmured: "madre mio!"

There was something about the manner of the poor, unfortunate long-sufferer that forbade Lena venturing too far in her fondling, something so sacred about her presence that it made her own voice seem a sacrilege. It's hoarse unnaturalness, as she first, face to face, spoke the loving word, "mother," sounded through the room like the last groan of a soul, relieved from earth's bondage. Why was it that her heart stood still? why was it that the vacant look seemed to pierce her, and send a cold thrill of horror through her frame?

She asked herself these questions, and her heart answered. She had always had a hope of seeing her she had been taught to love and revere, because her father had never given up the thought of again pressing his wife to his heart, pure and stainless. Why he felt that this would be so he could never explain to her, and she had been taught to think her mother would sometime bless her, and repay for the long and forced absence in a love and affection known on earth to but few. She had as the years rolled on hoped and prayed that it might be so;

but she never dreamed of meeting her with the stare of insanity in her eye, and an absence of motherly affection in her actions. The embraco just received had been as devoid of feeling as if given to a doll. Consequently the poor girl was bewildered, her joy was tinctured with a nameless sorrow, which made her faint and listless as a child, and she allowed herself to be led away to the trap by Panchito, who was now filled with forebodings of

misfortune, and wondered how Lena had prevailed upon her to make such a dangerous experiment as to bring her to the mad-woman's room.

With her last glances bent upon her mother, who had again commenced fingering her beads, and muttering prayers, Lena was assisted down into the cellar, the trap-door closed, and the two girls stood and listened, with fear and trembling, at the drunken discord, which had broken out afresh in the dining-hall, and sounded plainly in the cellar.

Clinging to the hand of Lena, Panchito approached the stairs, but before reaching the steps they were forced to pass through a bar of light, shining through the small grated opening. As they reached this spot the blood-curdling warning of a rattlesnake sounded from the window above them, which caused the girls to utter a low cry of horror, and gaze toward the point of alarm. That which they saw at first made their cheeks more ghastly, their breath to come in shorter gasps; for it was the hideously-painted visage of an Indian warrior.

A warning hiss proceeded from his lips, a fresh plucked magnolia blossom, white as the untrampled snow, fell—a sign of truce or faith—at the feet of Lena, and words came to her ears that brought the blood back to her pale cheeks, and doubled the hope in her heart.

"Pale Lily watch—Pale Lily no be afraid—Buckskin on trail—take Lily back to White-hair—Warlula watch—Greaser hurt Pale Lily, lose scalp—Warlula is a bird—he will sing in tree—sing when night come—maybeso fly—wah!"

Whether the last guttural expression was given in farewell or not, the girls could not tell, but they thought it meant a signal of danger, and as, at the instant of its sounding through the cellar, the head of the Indian disappeared, they supposed the danger had pointed toward himself.

Both realizing the danger they were in from discovery, they quickly mounted the stairs, traversed the various passages safely, and entered the room of Lena, Panchito locking the door as the former threw herself upon her knees by the bedside in thankful prayer, panting with fear, hope, and nervousness. Soon Panchito knelt by her side, and with arms clasped about each other the two wept together, their tears those of thankfulness at the promises and hopes of the future.

"Warlula is a bird—he sing when moon comes!"

These words sounded in their ears, almost an echo to those they had heard a moment before, in the cellar. Their eyes met in wonder, then strove in vain to pierce the dense foliage of the cypress; for they knew the words came from its shadows, and were intended for their ears alone.

Their star of hope was gaining in brilliancy, and its light was reflected in their eyes, as Panchito hastily gathered up the breakfast service, and exclaimed:

"My lady must not grieve more. She has two friends now; one outside and one inside of this accursed hacienda. When a red warrior of the plains says he is a friend you need not fear. I must go, but will watch the drunken Russians below. You have faith in this Buckskin the Indian speaks about, have you, my lady?"

"Yes, my dear friend, he is as sure to come as the moon to rise, if he can find the way. One of my worst troubles has been the thought that he was dead—that he lost his life in my service. A great load is lifted from my heart by the words of the Indian. God grant they may be true, and that my lips may thank him for his more than brotherly services."

A bright, hopeful smile, a warm kiss, and Panchito passed quickly out of the room, the door closed, the key grated, and the beautiful Castilian girl was alone.

Not she was not alone! a friend as true as the temper of a Damascus blade, with eyes everywhere glittering like those of a snake, and ears as sharp as those of the wild mustang lay along a branch, hidden in the screen of leaves near her window; the noiseless, deadly bow and arrow in his grasp, the long scalping-knife in his belt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAPARRAL.

The bandits who abducted Lena Castro from San Antonio had made long, rapid marches until over the Rio Grande, when feeling safe from pursuit they had indulged in drink, and

Buckskin Sam.

ngered in their camps, losing much time, it being ten days before they delivered their captive at the hacienda of their chief.

The Rangers, starting from San Antonio two days after the fight at the Mission, having been delayed by the wounds of Sam and Joe, and then by preparations for the long trail, had made some forty miles each day, until crossing upon Mexican soil they increased their length of march to fifty miles, being but eight days on the trail before reaching the vicinity of the robber retreat.

In fact the Rangers were within five miles of the retreat of Don Brogado when that degenerate son of old Castile had awakened from his drunken slumbers, and surprised Lena and Panchito by appearing in the room of the former.

Although the Rangers had been enabled by the well understood sign left upon the trail by the Tonkaway Indian, to gain a position so near to their foes, still they did not think it prudent to approach by daylight any nearer the hacienda. There might be a large force within the walls, who in that case could by having the advantage of position, and being upon their own soil, succeed in holding their own, and even eventually so thin the ranks of the Rangers that perhaps they might in the end annihilate the whole party.

What they might accomplish they knew must be done by strategy and surprise. Night would be the most favorable time for the attack, and they were now confident that within the walls was their daring spy the Tonkaway, who would ascertain the weak points and report to them before the time came for the assault.

It was not probable that Warlula would suppose them to be so near, but they knew he would not hesitate at a fifty-mile ride to give them the desired information; and he must be aware that they were within that distance.

The principal scouts in the invading party having come to this conclusion, they settled down to await news from the hacienda, securely hidden meantime in an opening in the chaparral, their camp being well guarded and the animals resting and luxuriating in the rich mesquite grass, which, in spots, grew thick and verdant.

To the south of the Ranger encampment, beneath the cool shade of a thick clump of mesquites, reclined Buckskin Sam and his pards. Upon the further side, toward the north, were Datch Pete, Austin and Mick McFillinny, in the usual arguments, so frequently brought about by their mixed nationality and ideas, though here prudence chained their tongues to low tones, which gave a call for extra vent to their anger in gesture, grimace and movement. As Big Foot expressed it, after rolling on the sward with the other boys in suppressed mirth:

"Tha w'u'd hav' ther ground tramped down as hard as ther inside o' a corral afore camp war broke?"

While the scouts were enjoying the antics of the singular trio who formed the debating club of the Ranger band, the quick, loud crow of the chaparral cock, unheard except at night, broke on their ears, followed by an exact imitation of the warning signal of a dozen enraged rattlesnakes.

Every man sprung to his feet in alarm, and every eye at the same moment guided by the sound fell upon the proud, erect figure of Warlula, who stood with folded arms in their midst, his stoical countenance showing no unusual emotion.

Guarded ejaculations of surprise and pleasure and warm hand-grasps greeted the Tonkaway brave. Then each Ranger seated himself on the sward, forming a circle.

In silence the Indian slowly drew his pipe from its pouch, seated himself also by the side of his white brothers, prepared for council.

Never before had Warlula seen a pipe go the rounds of a circle of braves so quickly; never before had his eyes encountered more eager, interested glances than those that were now centered upon him, awaiting anxiously the words to fall from his lips.

The pipe was returned to its owner, whose lips parted as the same was thrust into his pouch.

"Warlula is glad—he is proud of his white brothers—their eyes are keen—they ride fast—they ride long—my white brothers are great warriors—they sleep not on war-path—Warlula has trailed the wolf to his den—he is a hunting wolf, but Tonkaway can see like

panther—the chaparral is thick, the thorns sharp—Warlula can crawl like snake—the walls high, Warlula fly like bird—he has seen Pale Lily from big tree—Warlula say Buckskin come—say many white warriors on trail—Pale Lily heap glad—Greaser dog thick in big house—drink much whisky, make heap noise—they much fooling death songs 'fore 'nother sun come—Warlula go back see big Greaser Chief no burst Pale Lily—my white brother will come with warriors—he will be at big-gate when dark comes—big-gate look at sunrise—Warlula will make clear trail—much big fight, many scalps—Greaser got much blanket, much gold, much heap powder—my white brothers' guns shoot fast, shoot straight—Pale Lily will go back to white-hair father—Rangers no make noise—maybeso big chief Cortina come from Bravo—then too much Greaser for Rangers—Warlula go back—Pale Lily with wolves—wolves got sharp teeth—bite Pale Lily—Warlula no there—got talk, speak quick."

"My red brother," returned Sam, "is a great brave. There is room for another eagle-feather in his war-dress, and Buckskin will put it thereto with his own hands. Many thanks will be spoken from the lips of Pale Lily when her face is turned toward her home and father. The thanks belong to Warlula. He has done nobly, and we depend upon him to-night more than upon ourselves, for cunning wins oftener than strength, powder or steel. We will be at the big-gate, which fronts toward the sunrise, when dark comes. When Warlula hears a coyote yelp three times he will know his white brothers are ready for battle. The cry of a raven will tell us all is well. Any thing you boys think of to say to our red brother?"

"I don't rec'on," answered Big Foot, "that any one on us has a word ter sling what'll mak' any differ' in ther six o' things. All I has heard puts up ther job in open order, an' ther lay-out are spread 'zactly ter suit. All's re'dy ter commence ther game. Ef ther gal are in danger ther Tonk' better slide hisself back ag'in er she might git damaged afore we gits her outen ther claws o' ther cusses."

"Big Trailer talk good—Warlula got heap work—his knife will be red, when next see white brother."

Waving his hand the Indian arose and stalked away through the mesquites, and was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNBIDDEN GUESTS.

AFTER leaving the camp of the Rangers Warlula followed a narrow, winding trail through the dense chaparral, which towered far above his crouching form.

His eyes glanced suspiciously around upon all sides, at times stopping in his tracks and listening intently. Then, with long, rapid strides, he glided noiselessly on his way, until, still hidden by the foliage of the mesquites, cacti, and bristling dagger-leaved palmas, he came to the high adobe wall which surrounded the hacienda of the bandit chief.

Turning south, and following the wall, avoiding the thick clumps of red and black chaparro, cranberry bush, wax-berry, and junco, he came to a mesquite, the upper branches of which towered above the wall.

Quickly mounting up through the limbs, the Indian loosened a strong trailing vine, which he had evidently twined about the tree when he had started on his visit to the Ranger camp. The long, twining net-work of branches, and serpent-like twigs which sprung out in every direction from this vine, high up in a tree-top on the inner side of the wall, were strong enough to support a much heavier weight than the Tonkaway.

The end held by Warlula had been severed by his knife from its connection with the earth inside the garden.

Grasping this vine firmly the red-man made his way through the branches of the mesquite, as far away from the wall as the vine would admit, then braced himself, gave a flying spring, far out over the wall, and its dangerous clumps of prickly pear, into the tree which sustained the vine.

Warlula was inside the garden.

Glancing about, the Indian, seeing nothing to alarm him, quickly slid down the tree to the ground, groped his way through the thickets of fruit trees, until, near the hacienda, he mounted the cypress, and in a moment after was gazing through the grated window into the room where Lena Castro was kept confined.

Much to Warlula's satisfaction Lena was seated in a chair, to deep slumber. She had not been troubled by the bandit chief during his absence.

Not wishing to remain idle, Warlula climbed higher up the tree, and with some trouble succeeded, after carefully making his way out upon a limb which projected over the flat roof of the hacienda, in dropping upon the same without being seen or heard.

Walking toward that part of the house-top under which the dining-hall was located, Warlula distinctly heard from the chimney the sounds of rude song and laughter, mixed with ribald jest and oaths, from the bandits who were carousing below. His attention was, however, suddenly diverted from this din by the dull clang of a bell, and listening, he heard the clatter of hoofs upon the pavements of the patio.

Luckily the branches of the trees which stood by the main entrance drooped over the roof, and the Indian, hastening to the breast-high wall, was enabled, secure from observation, to see plainly through the foliage that the bandit chief, Don Brogado, who seemed much intoxicated, was welcoming the new-comers—a score of cut-throats, at whose head rode a finely-formed, large man, clad in a rich, highly ornamented blue velvet suit and armed to the teeth.

One glance told the Tonkaway that Juan N. Cortina, the scourge of the Rio Grande, the king bandit of America, was below, and a double scowl of hatred and gratification settled on his brow.

Amid loud clatter the horses were stabled; but instead of Cortina entering the hacienda he turned his mustang, ordered the gate reopened, waved an adios, and galloped toward Monterey, leaving his men as guests of Don Brogado. Thus, as was often said, the devil took good care that his right bower should not be caught in a trap. Had Cortina entered the hacienda, hundreds of brave men, whose mutilated bodies now molder in lonely graves in the chaparral, might be living yet, hundreds of homes now sadly bereaved might never have known sorrow, and the rancheros of the Rio Grande might count their cattle and horses by thousands where not a hoof-print is now seen.

Although the extensive dining hall of the hacienda was now crowded with lawless men, nearer brutes than humans, three to one against the little band of Rangers, Warlula's actions showed that he had no doubt of the issue.

Tightening his belt, he, with a spring, grasped the limb from which he had gained the roof, and was soon in his old perch by the window of the captive maiden, who, awakened by the clang of the bell and the bustle below, was pacing her apartment, with great anxiety depicted upon her features.

Suddenly the warning of the rattlesnake issued from the branches of the tree.

At first the sound made her shrink with fear and utter a stifled scream; but connecting it with the signal she had heard while with Panchito in the cellar, and also upon second thought knowing the rattlesnake does not frequent tree-tops, she advanced to the barred window.

"Maybeso Warlula snake, maybeso Warlula bird," spoke the Indian, in a low tone—"Warlula been to Ranger camp—Buckskin here wher dark come—heap more Greaser in big house—Cortina wolves—no bark more when sun come—sun go down in West—Greaser never see more—Pale Lily catch rope tie to iron."

The Indian as he spoke tossed the end of a lariat to Lena, who fastened it to one of the window bars.

Warlula, with all his strength and weight pulled on the lariat.

The iron bar bent, and one end slipped from its adobe socket and flew outward.

Fastening securely the end he held to a limb overhead he swung himself upon the window sill, unfastened the end from the bent bar, secured it to the one still firmly imbedded, drew out the loosened iron, stepped through the window, and stood in the room with her he had risked his life many times to save from a fate worse than death.

Lena gazed at the paint-grimed warrior, then made her way to his side and took his hand, torn and bleeding from the chaparral-groping, and tree-climbing.

"My kind, noble friend, how much I thank

you for what you have done to protect and save me from the brutes below. Words cannot tell—”

“Warlula no want thank,” interrupted the Indian, “Warlula got good squaw—he come save Pale Lily, for Buckskin—White brother say, Warlula, go Rocky Mountains, he go quick—Buckskin, he brother of Warlula.”

“Bet your last doubloon on that!” broke upon their astonished ears, and amid a rustle of leaves and springing of branches, Buckskin Sam bounded through the window, into the room, and grasped a hand of each.

“What for Buckskin come—want die?—how climb wall?” asked the Indian quickly.

“I came to see what kind of a fit-out you had here. I don’t want to die just yet and do not propose to do so. I found a way over the wall, for I am used to following your trail, Warlula. I left the boys about a mile from here; they will be ready for lively times when they are wanted.”

He turned to Lena, then, and from her full heart she burst out:

“May the Saints preserve you through this dreadful night! That I should bring you into such danger makes me wish that I had never been born. You saved me from the bandits at Mission Conception, but fate decreed they should recapture me after you were at the gates of death. You have traced me here, to this far-away haunt of outlaws. I have found through my misfortunes friends more true than I ever thought were found in this world. Surely all is for the best, for in being torn from the arms of a loving father I have found my long-lost mother; and through your efforts, and the help of God, our family may be re-united for the first time in my remembrance.”

“Can this be possible?” said Sam in surprise. “Then indeed this has been a fortunate turn in your life, and in the history of your family. But we have no time for further conversation. Thank Heaven we have the winning cards, and will save you and your mother, or leave our bones to the coyotes of Mexico!”

At this instant the key grated in the lock. Sam drew his revolvers and sprung behind the door as it swung open; the Indian darted around the draperies of the bed, drawing his scalping-knife; and Lena, pale as death, trembling for the safety of her friends, stood unable to move, in the middle of the room.

“Praise be to God!” burst thankfully from Lena’s lips, as Panchito entered, closed and locked the door.

“My lady is excited!” exclaimed the Mexican girl.

Then, discovering Sam at her side, and Warlula just coming from his hidin’-place, a scream was ready to burst from her lips; but it was stifled quickly by Sam, as, with one arm wound about her waist, his hand pressed her quivering lips, and he said in a low voice:

“We are friends, and here to take away from this den all who are kept here through fear or force.”

One look into the eyes of Sam, and Panchito smiled, for she recognized that a true friend was clinging to her.

“What are the bandits doing below?” hastily added Sam, as he released Panchito.

“They are drinking and singing, senor.”

“How many outlets are there to this hacienda?”

“Four, senor. Front, side, back, and a secret tunnel from the cellar to the stables.”

“Mark that, Warlula,” said Sam.

Then turning again to Panchito he added:

“Can you get Lena’s mother into this room without discovery?”

“I will try.”

“Too much talk,” broke in the Indian. “Warlula go kill Antonio—get key—open big gate—sun say good-by over plain—dark come soon—Buckskin go bring warriors.”

The Tonkaway sprung from the window and disappeared in the tree.

“Lena,” said Sam, “be calm and confident. This girl must bring your mother into this room and take the key and lock the door on the inside. You will then be safe while the battle goes on. I expect we will have a tough time with the devils. They will fight like demons, maddened as they are by the rum, but we must whip them here or they will hang on our trail and take in more than one of our brave boys. Have no fears for us. We are used to bloody games, when steel and lead are trumps. Good-by.”

Before he could prevent it Lena and Panchito had each seized a hand and pressed their lips

to his palms. Then he sprung through the window, slid down the tree, glided swiftly through the shrubbery, and over the wall by the swinging vine, moving off on his way to rejoin his anxiously waiting pards.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THEY FIGHT IN MEXICO.

ANTONIO the *portero* sat in his usual position puffing at a cigarrito, his *serape*, (blanket,) closely wrapped about him, as the dew was falling, and now and then he took a drink from a bottle of vino dulce, which lay on the sward by his side.

Little does he dream that around the wall, not fifty paces from him, are a score of hated Texans, armed to the teeth.

Little does he dream that not five paces behind him stands an Indian brave, with a long knife held tightly in his hand.

Softly, cautiously, as the panther stealing upon his prey comes Warlula. The grass gives no warning—it is fresh and green. One bound and the hand of the Indian drives the cigarrito into the mouth of Antonio, his knife cuts the air and is buried, with a sickening thud, to the hilt, and the *portero* gone to answer for his crimes.

Dragging his victim into the little lodge by the gate Warlula secures the key from the folds of the sash of the dead Antonio, and is master of the stronghold of Don Brogado.

Warlula has watched from his look-out in the tree, and knows if the gate swings wide open it will sound the bell inside the hacienda, and he will prevent this alarm being given.

The yelp of a coyote, thrice repeated, now sounds on the night air, and the caw of the raven breaks from the Indian’s lips in answer.

The moon glides on its course, high in the heavens; its rays filtering through the branches of the trees, upon the pavements of the *patio*, upon the form and fantastic war-dress of the Tonkaway—who has resumed his eagle-feathers and rifle, which have been secreted within the garden—and upon a score of Texan Rangers, crowded about the iron gate, peering inside.

The hacienda almost shrouded in shadowy gloom, prison-like, loomed up in silence; no noise being heard from its front that would indicate that occupants were within.

“What did I tell you, boys?” said Sam, in a guarded tone. “Warlula never promises what he don’t fulfill if life is given him.”

With a guttural grunt of satisfaction and pride the Indian inserted the key, and in an instant the ponderous gate swung partially open, Warlula remarking as the Rangers entered the grounds:

“Let gate go back, make heap big noise in big house—chief open door, see white warriors—maybeso no want Greasers know here.”

“Not yet, Warlula. Hold her where she is a moment. Wallace, we must divide the party. Some must surround the stables, and a few must be at each entrance. Where do you propose to locate yourself?”

“I rec’ons on sashayin’, longside o’ you, little pard. Yer so danged brash yer’ll git wiped out ef I don’t watch. I rec’on that Bill Lambert, Dutch Pete an’ Mick kan watch ther hole in ther stable, an’ keep ther loose Greasers frum takin’ ter ther mustangs, tho’ I don’t see how tha’ can h’ist tharsell’s over ther wall. I bets high money we has ‘em corraled closte, an’ no show ter slide out. Ben Thompson with a few pards kan put a stop on ‘em crawlin’ out ther hind door. Billie, Tom Clark, Jack Hodge, Clown, Joe, you, Sam, an’ this ol’ coon’ll take ‘em here, an’ keep our peepers peeled on ther east door, kinder scattered ‘round ther corner. Ther Tonk’ can h’ist hisself ‘round permiscuss-like, an’ watch fur ha’r, an’ chances fur all hands. He knows ther trap better’n we’-uns, an’ I rec’on will be kinder o’ a big boss o’ ther layout, fur he have brung us inter biz on ther buzz, in fust-class order.”

“All right, Wallace, you have arranged to my likens, and if this programme suits the other boys we’ll soon take our positions. Let—”

“Hold, me noble king of the Live Oaks,” interrupted Reckless Joe. “The next time you posish Joseph, give him a stand near the kitchen. Make a note of that and give him an orchestra chair in your brain-box. We will make no changes now; perhaps ‘tis better. Lead on, I’ll chew me way to grub or die hungry. Show me his satanic majesty, Don Lorenzo Brogado, and I’ll carve a fac-simile of the main entrance of the Alamo upon his breast. Sam, I’m despera e. I smell coffee

within those dismal walls; do something quick or I’ll chaw my own tongue up.”

“All right, Joe,” returned Sam. “Boys, take your positions; let the gate swing and show them we are ready to open game. Don Brogado will have a surprise-party which he will not care to welcome.”

Bill Lambert and Fighting Ben, each with a squad of men, went cautiously to their positions. Big Foot Sam and their pards stood concealed by the side of the porch, and by a wave of the hand Sam gave the signal for Warlula to swing back the gate, which he did. Then quickly he closed it and sprung into the gate-lodge of the *portero*, out of sight.

A moment after the dull clang of the bell resounded through the hacienda, Sam and Big Foot heard a heavy step inside the hall, accompanied by the sound of curses, loud and deep. Then the key turned, the door swung open and the bandit chief, with his rifle at a ready, stepped into the porch, raised his hand to shade his eyes from the bright moonlight and gazed toward the gate, exclaiming:

“Caramba! did my ears deceive me? The gate is closed. What means this mystery, Antonio?”

The name was spoken in a tone which showed a foreboding of evil, for he saw the *portero* was not at his post.

There was no time given for an answer. The iron grasp of Big Foot Wallace held him in a vise-like grip; Sam wrenched the rifle from his hands, and in a trice Don Brogado was bound fast to the trunk of one of his own trees, and securely gagged before being able to signal his followers.

While Sam and Big Foot were securing the bandit chief, Daring Bill and the other Rangers made a rush inside the hall, but all halted as the silence of death had taken the place of the low sounds of revelry which had struck their ears upon the opening of the door by Don Brogado.

“Halt, boys!” ordered Ben. “I’ll see what the devils are about and draw a few of their cards before the game is really open and they know what is trumps.”

Stepping to the door of the dining-hall, through the key-hole of which shone a bright light, Bill Thompson showed that he was well entitled to the cognomen of ‘Daring Bill,’ by throwing the door wide open and with a Colt’s six-shooter in either hand, standing boldly in full view of three score of cut-throats, who, standing in groups, or seated at the long table, extending the length of the vast hall, were holding their glasses filled with liquor ready to pledge their chief upon his expected entrance.

At the sight of Daring Bill with his cocked revolvers, they were, for a moment, thunderstruck, and stood or sat open-mouthed and staring at the solitary audacious Texan. That moment of inaction sealed the doom of many, for in a quick, rattling fusillade Bill fired his twelve shots before they could recover their surprise, or draw a weapon. Then he slammed the door shut and sprung back to the main entrance, where he met Sam and Big Foot, and while reloading explained his little game.

For a moment all was wild confusion within the dining-hall. Many of the bandits had been killed or wounded by the lightning-like fusillade of Daring Bill; and the outlaws were in total ignorance of what had become of their chief, or what force threatened them. Judging from the execution done by a single Texan, they had a poor show if many of his stamp were about, but being now ready, with their weapons in their hands, they, in a confused mass, without a leader, endeavored to plan some means of escape from the trap in which they found themselves. They knew Ben could not be alone, and conjectured that their chief had fallen, or was captured.

A rush was made by many out of the front hall, the Texans falling back into the *patio*. As the bandits crowded out the door, they sent deadly volleys into their massed ranks, blocking the entrance with dead, and driving the survivors back in terror, while curses and bladders drowned the groans and shrieks of the wounded.

The Texan yell now broke, wild and clear, from the rear, followed by the crackling clatter of revolvers, and the war-cry of Warlula, as the party of Fighting Ben poured death into those attempting to escape by the back entrance.

A score, at least, of these desperate bandits were wallowing in gore when the remainder regained their first position, the dining-hall,

The absence of their chief was still a mystery, and an unlucky occurrence in their present position, and Corlies, who had successfully made the raid after Lena Castro, was chosen chief for the occasion.

Some of the Mexicans were sent to the wine cellar to make their way through the tunnel to the stables and get ready the mustangs; others were sent up to the roof to pick off the Texans below with their rifles, and the main party, under Corlies, were to make a grand rush over the dead, out of the main entrance.

The Texans reloaded and awaited further operations. There was a pause, and all was silence except the groans of the wounded and the shrill screams of numerous night-birds, affrighted by the unusual din about their homes in the thick branches.

At this instant, when all were intently watching for the appearance of the bandits in another sortie, a delicate hand, followed by a black velvet sleeve thickly covered with buttons, was quickly thrust through the bars of the big gate, and the key which Warlula, in his hurry, had left in the lock was turned. The gate opened, and Black Bravo, followed by a Tonkaway Indian in war-paint, sprung inside the grounds and disappeared within the lodge of the *portero*, just as the gate slammed against the spring in the post and the bell clanged within the hacienda.

As the bell sounded the bandits under Corlies, thinking that Don Brogado had returned, charged in a body over the dead and into the *patio*. The Rangers, whose attention was attracted by the bell toward the open gate, were, for the moment, off their guard, but met the charge firmly, dealing death at every crack of their revolvers.

In this charge, when Big Foot and Reckless Joe were cut off from their pards, when the balls were cutting the air in every direction and the sudden fall of heavy bodies upon the pavements struck the ear each instant, Corlies sprung for Buckskin Sam, and pointing his pistol at his breast, pressed the trigger.

But as the pistol belched fire Black Bravo sprung between the muzzle and our hero, and received the ball intended for Buckskin Sam in his own breast, falling to the pavement at Sam's feet.

At the same instant Corlies also dropped dead from a shot through the brain, fired by Reckless Joe.

As Corlies and Black Bravo fell, the clatter of a hundred hoofs thundered over the pavement of the *patio*, and Don Jose Castro, at the head of his Texas Mexicans, appeared upon the scene.

A wild yell of relief and welcome broke from the bandits, for they thought, from the costumes and countenances of the new-comers, that friends had come to their relief.

A rally-yell from the Texans brought Fighting Ben and his crowd, with Bill Lambert, from the stables. Their rifles were turned upon the new arrivals; but quickly lowered as the leader shouted:

"Viva Don Samwell! Viva Texanos! Down with the bandits of Don Brogado! Jose Castro has come for his child!"

At this moment the bandits who had gained the roof poured a deadly volley into the ranks of the hated Texas Mexicans, many falling dead from their mustangs before they could fire a shot. Warlula, the first to discover the new point of danger, with a war-cry sounding from his lips, sprung for the big cypress, mounted, stopping an instant by the window to speak a word of encouragement, and inform Lena Castro of her father's arrival. Then he mounted still higher up, and bounded upon the roof. Before him were half a dozen bandits, firing down upon the *patio*, their backs turned to the Tonkaway.

Quickly the long scalping-knife cut the air, and loud sounded the Tonkaway war-whoop, as the glittering steel was plunged alternately into the hearts of three of the cut-throats before the others comprehended their danger, and sprang upon him with clubbed rifles.

One more falls, his breast cloven with a terrible blow from the red son of the prairies, who grasps a rifle descending upon his head and is grappled in a death embrace by the most powerful of the bandits. While the other is about to deal the Indian a death-blow from behind, he is himself caught in the arms of another Indian, that has apparently dropped from the clouds, who buries his knife deep in the breast of the Greaser.

Warlula and the burly bandit struggled

fiercely, neither able to gain an advantage, the Indian not daring to loosen his hold on the rifle, and each glaring hate into the other's eyes. Back and forth over the dead, slipping in the gore upon the roof, they go, locked in an embrace which can loosen only with the death of one or the other. The strange Indian, who arrived upon the scene so opportunely stands with one foot upon the bandit he has just slain, and draws a delicately formed and highly ornamented bow from the quiver at his back, together with an arrow.

Watching the fearful struggle before him he fits his arrow to bow, and with eyes like the sky-soaring eagle blazing with the fury of war draws the bow, and sends an arrow hissing into the very heart of the bandit, the feathered shaft resting against the cheek of Warlula, as it quivers at the sudden meeting of bone.

One flendish yell, a scowl of intense hatred, a gurgle and spurt of blood from mouth and nostrils and the last foe upon the roof of the hacienda sinks at the feet of the panting Warlula.

The Tonkaway turns upon his heel and confronts his preserver, who stands in silence before him with heaving bosom and modest mien.

Warlula gives a glance, 'tis but a lightning-look, then, with his war-cry sounding, and blood-dripping knife cutting circles in the air, he bounds into the cypress, for the sounds of war fill the air, and he is wild with the insanity born of battle and blood. His white brother is in danger, and he is soon at his side, shoulder to shoulder with him, fighting like a fiend.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF A LONG TRAIL.

UPON the bandits being satisfied by the words of Don Jose Castro and the firing of his men into their ranks, that the mounted Mexicans were their foes, and from Texas, their fury knew no bounds. They became desperate and strove to cut their way through the ranks of the Rangers, to get at those they hated and detested more a thousand times, than the whites.

For a few moments there was a rapid exchange of shots on both sides, the men under Don Jose firing over the heads of the Rangers with their carbines and revolvers.

In the midst of this terrific hail of lead the attention of the combatants was drawn toward the stables by wild yells and cheering, and there mounted upon mustangs, were a score of bandits, who had escaped through the tunnel in the cellar.

As they came thundering over the pavements toward the mounted men under Don Jose, a cheer arose from the hard-pressed and thinned ranks of their comrades at the porch, who were at this moment forced, by a desperate charge, headed by Joe, Sam and the Fighting Thompsons, back into the hacienda.

There were not over a dozen of the Mexicans left, as they retreated once more into the dining hall and barricaded the door.

The Rangers leaned on their rifles exhausted, and blood and powder grimed, gazing upon the charge of the mounted bandits, who came on from the stables at a reckless gallop toward the followers of Don Jose Castro. The trampling of many steeds had broken down the bordering shrubbery, until the *patio* was its original size, leaving quite an open space for the conflict of "Greaser ag'in' Greaser," as Big Foot remarked.

During the fighting Don Brogado remained tied to the tree in the shadows. He had been forgotten by those who placed him there, and not been discovered by the others.

He ground his teeth, as much as the gag allowed, in insane fury and madness, as he saw his men fall like the dry leaves of the forest; but as his hated enemy, Don Jose, appeared upon the scene, the bandit chief struggled, foamed at his mouth, and at last wrenched himself free by one almost superhuman effort, tore the gag from his mouth, and, as his men charged upon their mustangs from the stables, he rushed across the *patio* like a bounding buck, and met them in plain view of all upon the grounds.

At the moment Don Brogado reached his men, who recognized him with a yell of joy, one of the number dismounted and passed his saber to his chief.

Don Brogado sprung into the saddle, with a diabolical yell, whirled his saber in circles through the air, drove his spurs deep into the

flanks of his mustang, and at the head of his cut-throat band, charged down upon Don Jose and his Texas Mexicans.

The instant that the mounted bandits emerged from the stables Reckless Joe sprung toward the big-gate, exclaiming:

"Hang out your banners on the outer wall, close up your gates, the cry is still they come!"

Shutting up the gate to cut off all retreat, he sprung back to the side of his pard, Sam, yelling:

"Come on, you mangy scum! Come on, and darned be he who first cries hold. I have quantum sufficit! Brace up, boys, and hurl the demons into the pits of doubled-distilled damnation!"

"Hold, Joe, follow us! We've got to be mounted to cope with those fellows, for they are going right through Don Jose's party. Come on, boys, for the stables!" and the two life-long pards, Joe and Sam, together with Bill Lambert, the Fighting Thompsons, Ben and Bill, and also Big Foot, rushed around the hacienda, and securing each a mustang, which had been left ready saddled by the bandits, they galloped madly toward the *patio*, to the aid of Don Jose and his men.

Meanwhile the mounted bandits and Texas Mexicans were fighting like tigers, and the Rangers left behind, at the main entrance, were shooting the bandits from their horses with Sharp's rifles.

Don Brogado strove hard to reach his enemy, Don Jose; but the latter's men protected their aged leader heroically.

The bandit chief when, at last, he had but four men left able to fight, was reinforced by those from the dining-hall, who had recognized the yell of Don Brogado, and rushed out the unwatched back entrance; and all, pressed against the east wall of the hacienda, fought for dear life. Those on foot made a dash into the shrubbery and captured each a horse from whose back the owner had been shot. Then they gathered together around their desperate chief, who, yelling like a fiend incarnate, once more ordered a charge upon Don Jose and the men who were alive and standing firmly by their aged leader. But now the mounted Rangers came at a break-neck gallop upon the *patio*, and cut the bandit chief off from his contemplated revenge.

"Down with the murdering ladrones!" yelled Buckskin Sam. "But save Don Brogado! We want him alive!"

Sam, followed by his friends, each with his Colt's revolver presented, came like an avalanche upon the last forlorn hope of the bandit gang, and amid the rattling fusillade every follower of Don Brogado fell, pierced with balls, and the bandit chief found himself the center of a circle of deadly tubes, a tiger at bay, frothing blood from his gag-wounded mouth.

"Leave him to me, gentlemen," cried Don Jose Castro, dismounting from his mustang, and drawing his sword. "He has wronged me and mine more than human heart can conceive."

A quiet gleam of satisfaction overspread the brutish features of the bandit chief, as the circle of Rangers parted, allowing an opening toward the approaching Castro.

"Dismount, you dog of a murderer!" shouted Sam. "You despoiler of Christian homes and seducer of virtuous maidens! Face him from whom you stole father, mother, wife and child!"

With a gleam of intense ferocity the bandit chief sprung to the bloody pavement and rushed at Don Jose, their swords clashing together as the Rangers surrounded them, to prevent the escape of the robber chief.

Knowing that before him was the man who had caused him a life of intense misery, and brought him to age and gray hairs before his time, who had murdered his saintly parents upon their own hearthstone, and torn his wife and daughter from his arms, Don Jose fought with a consciousness that justice governed each stroke of his sword.

Knowing that naught but death awaited him Don Brogado fought with a desperation born of despair, hate, and madness.

Up and down the *patio*, over dead and dying, amid pools of gore, fought the panting men, neither gaining advantage, as steel clanged to steel, and sparks flew right and left.

But now new-comers appeared upon the scene of carnage and fierce passion.

An Indian, leading Lena Castro, who clings to her insane mother; and in their front Pan-

Brito, the Mexican girl, with flashing eyes, gazing here and there at the heaps of slain.

As the latter neared the circle of Rangers, she saw him who tore her from home, parents and virtue, to deceive her and murder her child before her eyes, and saw, too, he was engaged in a deadly conflict that might lose her sworn revenge.

Her features contorted, her eyes flashed with the pent-up passion of years of wrong and maddening misery, and drawing a stiletto from her girdle she broke through the ring of Rangers, and rushed with the fury of a tigress upon the bandit chief:

"He is mine! He has wronged me more than any human being on earth! I have sworn to have revenge and thus I take it!"

Bounding between the flashing blades, gazing into the eyes of her seducer she buried the steel in his breast, and as he fell, stood over him like an avenging angel, the moonlight, filtering through the foliage, casting a halo of silvery light about her queenly figure.

At this instant a white-robed girl flew past the Rangers, the word "father!" bursting from her lips, and Lena Castro was folded in the arms of her loved parent.

Then a moment later Buckskin Sam stepped to Castro's side, leading the insane woman, and addressed the old Castilian.

"Don Jose Castro, you have your daughter in your arms, unharmed. Now I restore to you your long-lost wife, Marietta Castro, stolen from this hacienda, once the happy home of you and yours, by the fiend at your feet. Terror and despair unseated her mind; but I think—I sincerely hope—that in time, with the kind care of yourself and your loving daughter, she will recover her senses; and that many happy days are in store for you all."

During the time Sam had been speaking Don Jose gazed in a dazed, bewildered manner at the spirit-like form before him; but when he really comprehended the words of our hero, and those hastily added by his daughter, Lena, the tears burst from his eyes, and he folded the unresisting, long-lost wife to his bosom.

At this moment the fighting Thompsons came up, bearing a wounded man, whose feeble moan drew the attention of Lena Castro. Despite the blood and powder grimed features she recognized Augustin Siliceo, her betrothed husband.

"Lena," explained Sam, "here is a gentleman who fought nobly through the desperate charges of the last part of this fierce battle, and he claims your soothing care and attention."

"An' here are another what'll put yer in the same persish, little pard," exclaimed Big Foot, mournfully advancing toward our hero, holding, as a woman holds an infant, one of the wounded in his arms. "Here are ther piece o' black velvit, what saved yer back at ter Sabinas; an' he's nigh on ter passin' his checks."

"By heavens, man, not only did he save my life on the Rio Sabinas; but here, to-night, he received the ball intended for me. Lay him down gently, Wallace. We may be able to save his life. He is a mystery to me, and yet I owe him more than I can ever repay."

Tenderly did Big Foot place the form of Black Bravo upon a blanket, spread out by Sam; and then, taking his handkerchief, he wiped away from brow and face the great beads of dew, wrung out by agony, and coming death.

The soft silk performed a miracle; for when it left the before stained face, pale, delicate, beautiful feminine features were disclosed to the view of those who gazed with deep interest upon the strange scout, who had appeared to them only in times of deadly peril.

The long lashes quiveringly lifted from the pallid cheeks, and the dark hazel eyes looked undying love into the face of Buckskin Sam. Big Foot loosened jacket and shirt to ascertain the extent of the wound, but sprung amazed to his feet.

A faint musical voice struck the ears of Sam as he gazed sadly down upon the mysterious stranger.

"Sam—don't—you know—Mary?"

The words came like a zephyr, born of the flutter of angels' wings.

"Great God in Heaven, who are you?" burst in gasping tones from the lips of Sam, as he fell on his knees and held his face down near that of the wounded girl—for such she was.

A gentle whisper again repeated his name in loving tones, the delicate hands clasped around our hero's neck, his long hair fell drooping

about her face, and he answered in a voice of anguish:

"Mary. My God, what does this mean?—why did you follow me—alas, I fear to your death?"

"Because—I loved—you, Sam—and thought you loved—Lena Castro. Tell me—you do not—that you—love Mary—and kiss me—before—I die."

It was agony to hear her words gasped out; and tears cut furrows down the blood and powder-grimed cheeks of the rough Rangers.

"By my hopes of Heaven, Mary, such a thought as love for Lena Castro never entered my brain. I came here to save her from a fate worse than death, and restore her to the arms of a loving, much bereaved father. I have never thought of love. I have only cherished even you as a friend; but now I swear, if you will but live I will love you more than mortal ever dreamed, and make upon this earth a heaven for you."

"Thank God!" whispered the dying girl.

"I can—die happy—I have—prayed for—this. One—more—kiss—Sam—meet—"

A heavy, soul-rending groan burst from Sam, and his form shook like an aspen.

All was over.

There, surrounded by dead and dying men, the taint of battle in the air, a true, pure spirit winged its way to heaven, leaving behind a strong, brave heart torn with agony.

As the last of her words was whispered, the last faint gasp died in his ear, Buckskin Sam folded the dead in his arms, and he who heretofore had allowed no sorrow to unbend him, whose yell of encouragement but a few moments before had rung in the fierce battle's front, bowed down to earth, with a grief beyond consolation, terrible to those who witnessed it.

In life he had known her but as a friend; in death suddenly he knew her as a lover.

Warlula approached his white brother, and by his side the strange Indian who saved his life on the roof of the hacienda, and who, in company with Black Bravo, saved Sam when surrounded and lassoed by the bandits of Cortina, on the Rio Sabinas. The war-paint had disappeared and Lulula was plainly revealed. Both stop, as they see the form of Buckskin Sam prone upon the pavement, his arms encircling Black Bravo. They keep their places at a respectful distance, awaiting the time when their white brother shall have controlled his grief. All who are within the *patio* are now aware of the sex of the brave, self-sacrificing stranger clothed in black velvet.

Each individual kept his place in silence, and respect for the sunder and unlooked-for grief of him they all loved as a brother.

The tip-ity-tip of a horse, coming up the trail from toward Monterey, caused no change in the scene, although many eyes glanced toward the gate, in surprise and anxiety.

The sound of the galloping horse came nearer and nearer. The animal and its rider entered the moonlit space at the gate and came to a sudden halt, the steed giving a wild snort of terror at the scent of blood.

Who was the rider?

Not one in that battle-worn band but knew him too well at the first glance.

The commanding figure, the gold buttons flashing in the moonlight, the polished mountings of saddle and arms, the black sombrero and plume, the long hair, and the poise upon the steed, as he quickly pulled the animal upon his haunches, in astonishment and apprehension, all showed the well-known fiend of the chaparrals, the scourge of the Rio Grande, Juan N. Cortina.

But an instant did the form of this celebrated chief stand outlined in the moonlight. The scene was too fearful for even him, reared amid bloodshed; and then there lurked there for him the deadliest danger. He whirled his mustang, drove spurs deep, and bounded into the dense chaparral, with a look of fear and horror upon his white face.

As Cortina disappeared the scene suddenly changed. A sheet of lurid flame sprung from the window of the wine-cellars, roaring like the sound of an approaching norther. The origin of the fire was explained to the observers by the sudden appearance of Dutch Pete and Mike McFillinny with a basket of bottles.

No doubt but what, in their explorations for the liquor they loved so well, they had set fire to the hacienda.

As the flames crackled and pierced the very heavens, filling the air with vast clouds of

smoke, all realized that their lives depended upon immediate departure, that the fire would signal the many followers of Don Brogado, who still lurked in their mountain retreat, and also bring down upon the Texans the soldiers of the republic, from Monterey.

Big Foot advanced and gently laid his hand upon the shoulder of Sam, saying:

"Little pard, rouse yerself—Mary Saunders are gone ter a heap better place ner this, an' we has ter hump ourselves or git our gizzards carved. Thar's sum' livin' ones ter care fur, an' we can't help thim what's taken the jump inter kingdom cum'. We all feels fur yer, an' all that; an' 'lows ter help go ther hull hog on avengin' her. We'll think o' Mary as well as ther Alamo when we cut our way thr'u' ther murderin' cusses herearter. Come, little pard, all ther boys is ready fur h'istin' themselves outen this bloody hole."

Recalled to himself by those words the manner of our hero changed. Raising his hands stained with the blood shed to save his own, upward toward the fire-lit sky, he exclaimed in a hoarse, unnatural voice:

"Gentlemen, hear me! From this night on I swear over the dead form of this noble, innocent maiden, whose affections, unknown to myself, were centered on me, and who has sacrificed her life for that love—over her bloodstained, murdered form I swear that henceforth I never give quarter to a dog of a bandit who has ever raised hand against a white man, woman or child; my heart shall know no mercy for the bandits of the Bravo!

"Now I am ready to prepare for departure; but I should not have peace in the future did I bury Mary Saunders within these walls. She shall not rest under this polluted earth."

One by one Sam's friends had gathered about him.

Lena Castro took his hand, the tears coursing down her cheeks, for she felt that she was in a manner the cause of the death of the unfortunate girl.

Then Warlula and Lulula each pressed Sam's hand to their hearts, Warlula saying:

"Buckskin Sam is warrior—when he sing death-song an' go happy hunting-grounds he meet black velvet squaw. She much brave warrior—too bad die—white brother sad, Warlula sad—Lulula heart bleed much for Buckskin."

Each of his Ranger friends spoke a kind word and gave a shake of sympathy. Then the bustle of departure created a busy scene. The horses of the Rangers were brought from the chaparral, and others, sufficient to mount the party and pack the booty, were gathered together.

The females and wounded were mounted first, and preceded by an advance guard they passed out of the gate.

The remainder of the Rangers followed, driving pack-mules laden with spoil, for Don Castro did not allow them to go away empty-handed from the house of his fathers. Only a little behind the rest rode our hero, surrounded by his nearest friends and bearing in his arms the dead body of Mary Saunders.

Taking a north-west course through the chaparral they rode on until at last, beneath the drooping branches of the bottom-timber, on the banks of the Rio Salinas, they buried the murdered maid. Then slowly they made their way toward the ford near the juncture of the Rio Alamo and Rio Grande, and at last once more pressed foot on Texan soil.

A few months later Buckskin Sam had the honor of being Augustin Siliceo's best man, upon the joyful occasion of his marriage with Lena Castro, the fair lily of the Alamo.

The wedding took place at the residence of Don Jose, at San Antonio; and of all of Buckskin Sam's friends who followed the long trail from Don Brogado's haunt, not one was absent. But best of all was the sight of a noble-looking, white-haired woman, who, with a quiet dignity, watched the ceremony that joined the two lovers for eternity. The wife of Don Jose had recovered her scattered senses, and though almost childlike in the simplicity of her manner, would henceforth be to him the loving partner of whom, for so many wretched years, he dreamed.

Of the Rangers mentioned many still live; and Buckskin Sam, (Major Sam S. Hall) now resides in Wilmington, Delaware, where new found "pards" often listen to his stories of the dangers he has known on the trails in the Lone Star State.

THE END.

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